IN THE WAR WITH MEXICO

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

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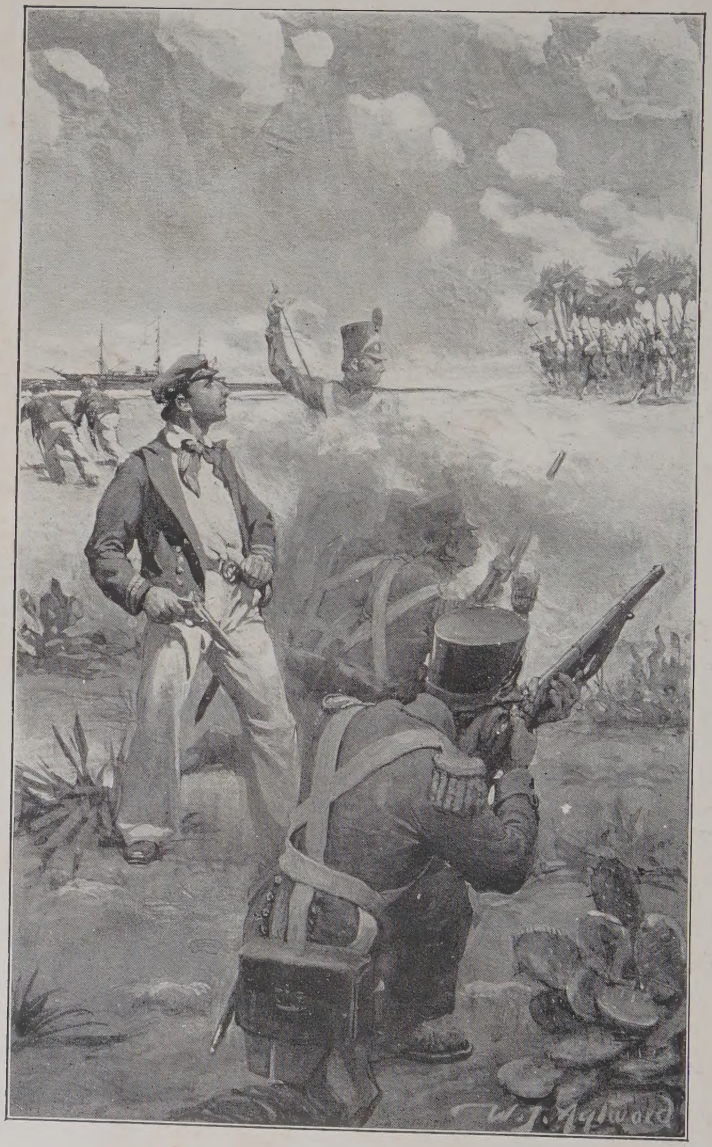

Awaited the Onrushing Horsemen

BOYS OF THE SERVICE

IN THE WAR WITH MEXICO

A MIDSHIPMAN'S ADVENTURES ON SHIP AND SHORE

BY

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

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ILLUSTRATED BY

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TO MY DAUGHTER

ELIZABETH

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IN THE WAR WITH MEXICO

CHAPTER I

A DARING PROPOSAL FROM THE MIDSHIPMEN

A PUFF of white smoke from the castle walls, followed by the distant boom of a cannon and a little later by a heavy shot, better aimed than usual, which splashed into the water across the brig's forefoot, gave sufficient warning to her captain that he approached nearer to the walls at his peril.

"There's no use going in any closer, I take it," remarked the captain, coolly, to his first lieutenant, as they observed the fall of the shot.

"No, sir, I think not. We couldn't possibly overhaul her before we ran in pointblank range of the guns yonder."

"No, I suppose not," returned the other, "yet I hate to let her go. Dash it all, she'll be the first vessel to run the blockade since we have been on the station! I dislike to break a clean record."

"I don't think the commodore can fault us in this instance, sir," urged the lieutenant, respectfully,

"since he has taken the fleet down the coast and left us here alone with this little brig. We've got a long stretch of water-line to cover with one small boat, sir."

"Ye-es, true. The more honor to us, though, if we cover it well. Hello! There goes another gun. By Jove!" continued the captain, marking the flight of the shot, "across our bows, too! Well, I reckon——"

He was interrupted by a third shot which whistled over the deck, parting the weather foretopmast backstay just over a seaman's head. At this some rather anxious glances were cast back at the young captain standing coolly on the weather rail, grasping the forward swifter of the main rigging. He was a dare-devil, the men knew, but they wondered if he intended to hold on and engage the gigantic fort now in long gunshot ahead of him with his small, ten-gun brig.

"Put the brig about, Mr. Claiborne." he said after a little pause, in a calm, even tone of voice.

The executive officer needed no second command. The orders were given instantly and obeyed with astonishing celerity by the men. As the brig shot swiftly and gracefully up into the wind, for she was as handy and speedy a boat as was ever sailed, her starboard guns bore fairly on the chase and the castle. They had been cast loose and loaded sometime since, and as the vessel rose on an even keel and hung in the wind a moment or two preliminary to falling

off on the other tack, the captain ordered the men to the starboard battery.

A moment afterward, in obedience to a further command, the short thirty-two-pounders—carronades, obsolete and ineffective guns to which the old navy clung most unaccountably—which had been trained on the daring blockade-runner ahead, roared out their answer to the fire of the castle, which was now become quite general. The maintopmast of the flying vessel was cut away by a fortunate shot, and she might have been otherwise damaged, though they could not tell on the pursuing brig, for the distance between them was too great. Of course, the loss of the maintopmast materially retarded the speed of the chase, but it was hopeless to think of taking possession of her then, for she was well under the guns of the fort. Still, it was some satisfaction to the Americans that the vessel they were pursuing had not got off scot free, and the bluejackets cheered heartily as they saw the effect of their broadsides.

"You may run down toward Verde Island, Mr. Claiborne," said the captain, as the brig came to on the other tack and showed her heels to the fort, running rapidly and easily out of range of her guns, without taking any harm from the bombardment her boldness had evoked. "Secure the batteries, call the men from their stations, and set the watches, sir, as usual."

In a little while the gunners on the fort, seeing

the futility of their efforts, ceased firing and the brig resumed her monotonous beat along the shore just out of range of the guns of the castle. The captain, after a careful inspection of the horizon, in the hope of detecting another sail, went below to his cabin. The first lieutenant turned the deck over to the passed midshipman, whose watch it was, and then retired to the wardroom, and the watch off prepared to enjoy a few moments of leisure. The captain was busy writing when he was interrupted by a message from the officer of the watch to the effect that Passed Midshipmen Hynson and Denton would like to speak with him.

"Bid them come below into the cabin," he said, and in a few moments the two young men presented themselves.

"Well, young gentlemen," said the commander sharply, as they saluted him formally, "what is it?"

"If you please, Captain Semmes," answered Denton, a handsome young fellow of sixteen, who had already been four years in the service and had recently passed his examinations at the newly organized Naval Academy, being among the first to receive the valued diploma of that remarkable institution, "if you please, sir, Captain Semmes, we thought——"

The boy hesitated. He had but recently joined the *Somers*, and Semmes, although a young man, was a rather stern autocratic commander, like most of the officers of the old navy, of which he was a shining light.

"Well, what is it? Speak out, sir."

"We thought, sir, as long as she—as she is the only one that's got by us——"

"What are you talking about?"

"The brig that we chased in this afternoon, sir."

"Well, what of her?"

"We want to cut her out, sir."

"Wh-at!" cried the captain, in apparent surprise, "are you in favor of this mad scheme, sir?" he continued, turning to the other midshipman, who was a year older than Denton, although he belonged to the same class.

"Yes, sir."

"Which of you originated it?"

"I rather think that it came to both of us at the same time, sir," answered Midshipman Denton, modestly.

"And you two young fire-eaters wish to cut out that brig, which will probably anchor close under the guns of the fort?"

"Yes, sir."

"Humph!" snorted the captain, looking at them sternly, but with a twinkle in his eye belying his severity. "Step into the wardroom, Mr. Denton, find Mr. Parker, present my compliments to him, and ask him to come into my cabin."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Ah, Mr. Parker," continued the captain, as the second lieutenant of the brig hastily descended the companion-way, buttoning his coat as he came, "sit down, sir."

The invitation to be seated was an indication of Parker's rank, which was indeed as high actually as that of the captain of the brig, who was a lieutenant in the navy and only captain by courtesy because he commanded a vessel. The midshipmen were allowed to stand. Indeed, they would have been embarrassed in any other position.

"These two young dare-devils," remarked the captain, with some appearance of sarcasm, "want to cut out the brig we have chased. What do you think of it?"

"Excellent plan, sir," returned Parker, promptly.

"You're as bad as they are, eh?" said the captain, smiling. "Well, I reckon we're all of the same mind on this brig, for I was just about to propose it to you when these youngsters forestalled me. The service is going to the dogs, eh? when midshipmen take the initiative away from their commanding officer. Don't say a word, Mr. Denton. You know the opinions of the captain are not discussable!"

"Yes, sir," answered Denton, promptly and meekly.

"You think it is feasible, Parker?"

"I see no reason why it shouldn't be, sir."

"How would you propose to go about it?"

"Well, sir," said Parker, who was a great favorite with all the officers on the ship, "so long as these young men proposed it to you, I might venture to suggest that it would be fair to them to hear their plan."

"Ah, quite so. What is it, gentlemen?"

The two young fellows looked at each other in dismay. To be honest, they had not given the subject of plan any particular thought.

"Well, sir, er—a——"

They stared at each other with much embarrassment. Finally Hynson broke out.

"Well, sir, er—I suppose—we might take the cutter and wait until night—and—and—er—just dash in boldly and cut her out, sir."

"You might, eh?" questioned the captain amusedly. "If your courage were not of a much higher quality than your strategy, Mr. Hynson, I am afraid you would eventually come to grief as an officer, sir."

"I have it, sir," cried Denton, who had been thinking desperately during Hynson's confused attempt, "if you will give us the quarter boat, sir, and a half-dozen men, we'll pull to the English frigate to-morrow afternoon as if to make her a visit. You know we sometimes do that and there'll be nothing suspicious about it. She lies just out of range of the guns of the fort. Then, as soon as night falls, we'll leave the frigate, make for the brig——"

"What will you do then?"

"Capture her by a sudden dash, sir. They'll all be asleep aboard her, I take it."

"And after the capture? Bring her out or burn her?"

"We should be governed by circumstances, sir."

"Very good, indeed. The plan is a practicable one, eh, Parker?"

"Quite, sir."

"And you think you two youngsters can bring it about?"

"Sure of it, sir," they answered promptly in chorus.

"Well, I don't doubt you could, but I think it would be better for me to send Mr. Parker along in charge. You see this bearding a castle like San Juan de Ulloa, with six men in a small boat, is a rather ticklish performance; and, while I don't doubt that your courage is equal to anything, I think it best that an older and more experienced officer of this brig should oversee the job. I am sorry for your disappointment, young gentlemen," he added more kindly, as he saw the intense regret in the faces of the two boys, "but if you succeed there will be glory enough for all of you, and, if you fail, it won't be for lack of judicious leadership. You agree with me, Mr. Parker?"

"Yes, sir, certainly."

"Then there is another thing. It is more than probable that some of you may have to do some talking. If I know anything, they'll anchor that brig within pistol-shot of the walls and you are apt to be hailed. Now, although you two youngsters have been studying Spanish off and on ever since you joined the brig at Pensacola in July, neither

of you is quite proficient in it yet. Eh, gentlemen?"

"No, sir," answered both young men reluctantly enough.

"Whereas Mr. Parker here speaks it like a native," continued the captain. "Don't you, Mr. Parker?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good, that is another reason for sending him in charge. Let us see what time it is," said the captain, but before he could pull out his watch eight bells were struck forward, signifying that it was four o'clock.

"Ah," remarked the young commander, listening to the mellow couplets of the bell followed by the hoarse bellowing of the boatswain's mate—"All the port watch. A-all the port watch!"—"I do not see why we should not make the attempt to-night instead of waiting until to-morrow. There is no moon and not much breeze—no heavy sea on, that is. Suppose, as we run toward the usual anchorage under Verde Island, Mr. Parker, you make preparations for starting at once. We'll give them no time for anything. She may have valuable cargo aboard, and if we strike promptly she won't be able to land any of it."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Parker, heartily, rising as he spoke. "Shall we attempt to bring the brig out?"

"By no means," answered the captain, "burn her

where she lies. Take the cutter with these two young gentlemen and five men. Choose any you like. Have plenty of combustibles for making a quick fire. Let the men conceal their arms in the bottom of the boat while they're pulling over to the *Endymion.* By the way, you may present my compliments to Captain Lambert and give him a cask of that sherry we took out of the last prize. That will be excuse enough for visiting her, I think, and I don't believe I'd mention what you intend to do after you leave the frigate."

"Certainly not, sir," said Parker.

The *Endymion* was one of the squadron of foreign vessels which had been sent by their respective governments to Vera Cruz to observe the operations of the American fleet during the Mexican war. There was much cordiality and visiting between the foreigners and the Americans.

"I think that will do," continued the captain, thoughtfully; "of course I shall expect you to carry out the thing handsomely."

"Trust me for that, sir," answered Parker.

"I know that, Parker. And see here——"

"Yes, sir?"

"Look out for these youngsters!"

"Ay, ay, sir," laughed the lieutenant, saluting and leaving the cabin, followed by the two boys.

CHAPTER II

OLD BEN GRIFFIN WILL GO ALONG

As he came on deck Mr. Parker spoke to Lieutenant Claiborne, telling him of the proposed expedition, and transmitting the captain's order to run down and anchor for the night under the lee of Verde Island. Satisfying himself before he did so that there was no sail in sight, by hailing the masthead where a lookout was constantly on watch, Claiborne directed Sailing Master Clemson, who had the deck, to run off free and prepare for anchoring in the usual place.

"Now youngsters," said Parker, "we've a tidy bit of work before us to-night, and I don't want to spoil our chances by lack of preparation. We ought to take the best men on the ship. Let's see who'll they be? Or whom would you like to take, since it's your expedition, you know?" he added, graciously.

"Old Ben Griffin for one, sir," suggested Denton, promptly.

"Of course. And Sam Powers. You couldn't separate those two."

"Yes, sir, and young Nutter, sir. I think he'd like to go," said Hynson.

"He's rather young, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir," assented the midshipman, "but he's a plucky lad and a good oar, and I like him, sir."

"Well, Nutter let it be then. That leaves two more."

"I suggest Chaffen for one, sir," said Denton.

"And Brice for the fifth, sir," continued Hynson.

"Very well. That completes the number. The four older men can pull oars, and Nutter can steer. I don't know how old Ben, being chief bo's'n's mate, will like to pull an oar."

"I'll answer for him," said Denton, "he'd do anything for the sake of getting into a good fight, that old man would."

"Yes, I suppose so," remarked Parker. "Well, we'll want plenty of inflammable stuff. Tell the carpenter to give us a lot of oakum well soaked with oil and tar, and whatever else he's got. Let the men take their cutlasses and pistols and put two or three muskets in the boat. Bring a lantern and a compass. And I believe it would be a good plan to have a bag of bread and a breaker of water aboard, too. The weather around here is so hanged uncertain that you never know what's going to happen when you get away from your ship."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the young men, touching their caps.

"We ought to anchor in half an hour. We'd better start as soon as everything is made snug. We'll have a long pull to the *Endymion* and we

must get there before dark. And, Hynson, see that the cask of sherry the captain spoke of is put in the stern sheets, too. Now, go and make your preparations."

The two boys touched their caps again and turned away.

"Hynson, you attend to getting the boat ready, and I'll look after the men," said Denton.

"All right."

They separated at once to attend to their several duties.

Old Ben Griffin was standing in the weather gangway leaning over the rail staring out to sea.

"Ben," said Denton, tapping him on the arm, "what do you say to a little cutting out expedition?"

"Me, yer honor? I sez 'ay, ay' to onct."

"I thought so."

"Is it the brig we wus jist a-chasin'?"

"It is. Mr. Parker goes in charge with Mr. Hynson and myself, and five blue-jackets. We want the five best men on the ship and of course you come first."

"In course," assented the old man with deep gravity. He had no modest appreciation of his abilities and station. "Ef I mought make so bold, sir, as to ax a question——"

"Go ahead."

"Who mought be the others?"

"Powers, Chaffen, Brice, and Nutter."

"Nutter!" snorted the old sailor. "W'y, he's only a boy!"

"He's older than I am," said Denton, with great dignity.

"In course, in course, but——"

"Well, Mr. Hynson wanted him to go. He's a great favorite of his, you see. He can steer."

"W'ich means that I'll hev to pull an oar, I guess."

"It does. Mr. Parker said he thought you might object to pulling an oar, being chief bo's'n's mate, but I said you'd pull anything to get into a fight."

"Ay, that I will, but as Mr. Parker remarks, w'ich he's a werry obserwin' officer, I'm sure, 't ain't in 'cordance with my rank to be a-settin' on them thwarts w'en boys like Nutter is cocked up in the starn sheets. Howsomnever, we'll let that pass, an' Mr. Ned, I'm glad ye got me in."

"Pshaw, Ben, we couldn't do without you on this brig."

"Wall, bein' the oldest an' most experienced man aboard, nacher'ly I'm sum importance. Lord, Master Ned, how your father'd enj'y a little expedition like this yer one. I never sailed with him w'en he wus a boy, but I've heered old Jack Lang tell about him, an' he wus a devil fer a fight. W'ich I means your father, not Jack Lang. Yet, come to think on it, the old man wus good an' reddy fer a scrimmage, too. Old Jack wus a fine 'un, but he

talked too much. He wus allus a-thinkin', too, that he wus a silent, speechless sort of a man. W'y, w'en I wus a ship's boy with him on his last cruise, he sez to me, sez he: 'Ef you didn't talk so blame much there'd be sum hopes of makin' a seaman out'n you, Ben Griffin. But yer jaw tackle is allus runnin' so free I'm a-feered that you'll never 'mount to nuthin'. Ye works the lower part of yer head too much an' the upper part too little fer ye ever to raise to the position of chief bo's'n's mate.'

"W'ich I didn't say nuthin', bein' only ship's boy then, an' him an old man who mought hev been my granddad. But he continoos: 'Ef ye takes pattern arter me, obserwin' me close like an' follerin' me, you mought git over with that disabilerty of your'n an' make sumthin' out'n yerself, but y've got to keep quiet.' W'ich I done it reg'lar sence that day, fer 'twus good adwice.

"Oh, he wus a prime seaman, wus old Jack Lang, ef he did talk too much. An' I follered him an' done everythin' like him, all 'ceptin' talkin'. An' he thought he wus a silent man, too! Wot boat are ye goin' to take, sir?"

"The port quarter-boat. Mr. Hynson is looking out for her. You'd better report to him and send the carpenter's mate to him, too."

The old man lifted the silver whistle that hung from a snowy lanyard around his neck and blew a shrill trilling call on the pipe; then he bellowed out in a voice which would have been adequate to a

ship-of-the-line, but which was entirely out of proportion to a ten-gun brig.

"Pass the word fer the carpenter's mate. Ah, there ye are, Chips," he continued in a lower tone, as that worthy stuck his head above the combing of the main hatch. "You're to lay aft an' report to Mr. Hynson by the port quarter-boat, to onct."

"And Griffin," said Hynson at the same moment from where he stood, not twenty feet away, "send me the gunner's mate, and the purser's yeoman."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the old man, again passing the word as before.

It would have been a distinct derogation of dignity for him to call them personally to him, and the routine he indulged in would have gone on if they had been at his elbow. The last ship on which he had sailed had been the *Columbus*, a 74. He had only been transferred to the brig *Somers* in order to be near young Denton, to whom he was devotedly attached. It was ridiculous to pass the word in that stentorian voice on a little 250-ton vessel, measuring scarcely 100 feet from stem to stern, and carrying a crew of perhaps eighty men, but it had been highly necessary to do it that way on the huge 74, with a crew of six hundred, and old Ben faithfully kept up the practice. He believed in magnifying his office and the officers indulged him in his desire.

There was a great deal of useless formality and severity in the old navy. The officer of the deck, for instance, on the *Somers*, although he could have

been heard all over the ship by speaking in an ordinary tone of voice, in anything short of a hurricane, always used a trumpet to deliver the simplest order. They were great sticklers for form and ceremony, were these sailormen of the past.

Among the fleet which was assembled in the Gulf later on during the Mexican War were several small schooners mounting one gun. Denton, being sent off to one of them on one occasion, rather cavalierly ran his boat under her quarter and stepped on board over the low rail, only to be severely reproved by the commanding officer with the remark :

"This vessel has a gangway, sir, and when you board her again see that you use it ! The idea, sir, of coming on board an American man-of-war by stepping over the port quarter !"

Even the officers of these little schooners sported a trumpet, and when they gave their orders they made almost as much noise as the reports of their single gun. So old Ben was in good company, after all.

Denton soon found the rest of the men, who expressed themselves as highly pleased at the opportunity of participating in the daring expedition. They had been on the blockade now for five or six months, and it was weary work. Consequently the men were delighted at the chance of breaking the monotony.

The ship having reached her appointed station for the night, the anchor was let go, the sails were

clewed up, the lighter ones furled, and the heavier ones left hanging in the brails, so that she could slip her cable and get under way in an instant if necessity arose. Of course, if there were the slightest prospect of it coming on to blow everything would have to be made snug, but the night bade fair to be calm and pleasant and there was, therefore, no cause for uneasiness.

It still wanted a good hour to sunset when the boat pulled away. The men on the ship cheered tremendously as the little party shoved off. They were all disappointed at being left behind. Indeed there was scarcely an officer or man on the ship who had not begged and implored to be taken so soon as it was learned that an effort was to be made to destroy the brig that had escaped them that afternoon.

"Mr. Parker," called out the captain, as the boat shot out from under the counter, "good luck to you!"

"Thank you, sir."

"And by the way, so soon as I see the flames, or so soon as I think you have had time to reach her, I'll get under way and stand in toward the castle to pick you up. We'll ratch to and fro just out of range, and we'll show lights and burn a flare forward, so you can't mistake us."

"Thank you, sir."

"God bless you!" called the captain, and by way of an "amen" the crew burst into loud cheers again.

CHAPTER III

THE SILENT POWERS SPEAKS TO THE PURPOSE

THE *Endymion*, a handsome frigate rated as a 44, which was built by the English during the war of 1812 to compete with the American frigates of the famous *Constitution* class, lay a long distance in shore from the place where the *Somers* had anchored, between the American brig and the formidable castle of San Juan de Ulloa. The sea being smooth, the four brawny seamen sent the little cutter over the gentle swells at a great pace. Yet it was already dark when Mr. Parker gave the command "Oars!" as they shot around under the starboard quarter of the frigate.

"Boat ahoy!" called out the marine sentry in the starboard gangway, presenting his piece as he hailed.

"Boat from the U. S. Brig-of-war *Somers*, with a message for Captain Lambert," answered Parker, promptly, as the boat swung in toward the battens extending from the gangway to the water line along the ship's side, which took the place of an accommodation ladder. As the boat touched the planks of the frigate, the officer of the deck appeared in the gangway, displacing the watchful

sentry, and courteously invited the Americans on board. Bidding the seamen to hold on as they were for a few moments, Parker, followed by the two midshipmen, scrambled up the battens aided by the man-ropes, and saluted the deck as he stepped upon it.

There was much visiting between the different vessels of the American squadron and the foreign ships observing the operations, and Mr. Parker and the *Endymion's* watch officer, Lieutenant Claggett, already knew each other very well. After the formal interchange of compliments required by naval etiquette they shook hands vigorously, and Parker announced that he had a cask of sherry taken out of a prize lately captured by the *Somers*, which he desired to present to Captain Lambert with the compliments of Captain Semmes, such a gift never coming amiss to a seaman!

The American lieutenant was graciously received by the English captain, who invited him, with some of the officers of the frigate, to partake of liquid hospitality in his cabin—in which the cask of sherry, which was passed on board through a convenient port, was immediately broached to provide some of the wherewithal. The two midshipmen meanwhile were taken possession of by the English youngsters on the quarter-deck, and were formally escorted to the steerage where they were made heartily welcome.

Mr. Parker thought it best to kill a little time

before venturing further upon his dangerous undertaking. He deemed it yet too early in the evening for a surprise. If they could delay their attempt for an hour, the men on the blockade-runner would probably be asleep, which would make their chances of success much greater.

It was to be a small affair, as cutting-out expeditions go, but it was nevertheless dangerous, for as they approached the frigate before nightfall they observed that the brig that they had chased during the afternoon was moored not more than sixty feet from the wall of San Juan de Ulloa. One discharge from the guns of the fortress—provided it hit her—would sink her where she lay with all on board. In fact, the attacking party would be completely commanded, even by the pistols of the garrison. Therefore everything depended first upon taking the Mexicans unaware, and after that upon the celerity and quiet of their movements.

Any extensive resistance on the part of the crew would give the garrison time to assemble, and would be fatal to the Americans. If the men of the *Somers* could catch the men of the brig napping, or find them asleep, they would have a fighting chance. If they did not, their chances for making a successful assault on the brig would be small.

It was necessary, therefore, to pass the time on the English ship. It would not have been good policy for them to visit the English ship any later in the evening than they did either, and it would

certainly be distinctly fatal to the expedition to let the English captain know that they were using him as a base of attack; for he might consider, if his attention were called to it, that such an action involved permission on his part, which would be regarded, and rightly so, as a breach of his neutrality.

But it was quite certain also that after he found that it had been done, he would not care anything about it. For then there was nothing he could do except perhaps protest for form's sake. So after the cask of sherry was passed on board, the boat was fastened under the main chains to leave the gangway clear, the men shipped their oars, lighted their pipes and disposed themselves comfortably to wait. The American officers spent a genial hour in conversation with the officers of the frigate. The men in the cutter were not forgotten, either, for, by Captain Lambert's orders—Mr. Parker's permission having been asked and received, of course—a liberal supply of "grog" was passed out, whereby each man might "splice the main brace." It is to be presumed that the English captain suspected something was up, but he discreetly said nothing about his suspicions if he entertained any.

As the bell forward struck two, signifying nine o'clock, Mr. Parker concluded that it would now be safe for him to venture. Therefore, bidding Captain Lambert and his officers good-by and being charged with many messages of gratitude and thanks to Captain Semmes for his thoughtful courtesy, the

lieutenant called his midshipmen, summoned the boat to the gangway through the officer of the deck and descended thereto.

While the officers had been on the frigate, the men in the cutter, previously instructed, had muffled the oars with bits of cloth in order to deaden the rattling, rolling sound they made in the rowlocks. They had also overhauled the rags, paint, oakum, and so on, which they had brought along, to kindle the fires, got their lantern burning in good shape under its concealing hood, buckled on their cutlasses, looked to the charging of their weapons—although Parker had determined that no man should carry a fire-arm except himself and the two officers, for fear lest the discharge of a pistol inadvertently or causelessly should alarm the garrison—and got everything in readiness for quick, prompt work. They pulled away from the ship in perfect silence, so much so that, the darkness hiding them from view, the English officers could scarcely believe there had been a boat there.

After they drew sufficiently far from the frigate, they made a wide detour and headed straight for the chase, whose riding light they could see plainly against the black shadows cast by the towering walls of the fort. For some time they rowed in silence, which was finally broken by a chuckle from the coxswain's box. The noise sounded queerly in the darkness and Parker turned about curiously, not knowing whether the boy was laughing or crying.

"What's the matter, young man?" he asked, sharply. "What are you blubbering about?"

"I ain't a-blubberin', sir," answered the young fellow, touching his cap, "I'm only laughin'."

Laughter seemed almost as strange as tears under the circumstances, and Parker spoke rather gruffly.

"What's there to laugh at, I'd like to know? What do you mean, sir?"

"I beg your honor's pardon," returned the boy, "but I jest couldn't help it, sir. Powers, he—he——"

"What have you been doing, Powers?"

Powers was known as the most taciturn man on the ship. Consequently he was old Ben Griffin's bosom friend, for he never prevented that worthy from talking as much as he pleased, a habit the old man had acquired from his association with Jack Lang, thirty years before.

"What have you been doing, Powers?" Mr. Parker asked, curiously.

"Me, sir?"

"Yes."

"Nuthin', sir."

"What have you been saying?"

"Nuthin' much, sir."

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Parker, baffled at the man's taciturnity.

"If yer honor pleases—" broke in old Ben Griffin.

"Heave ahead," said the officer, a note of relief

in his voice. "Now we'll get something anyway. You never open your mouth, Ben, without saying something and it's like breaking a water-cask out of the lower tier in the after-hold to get anything out of Powers."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the old man, "I'm allus thankful at bein' able to say wot I wants in a few words. Well, sir, ye see, sir, them fellers on the *Endimmon* wus stickin' their heads out'n the gun-deck ports an' a-chaffin' us fellers, an' we wus given them beef eaters as good as they sent an' more, too. W'ich I sez it they can't even out-talk us."

"I should think not," remarked Mr. Parker, sotto voce.

"Unless it'd be a man like Powers here, that ain't usually got nuthin' 'tall to say for hisself, but w'en he does say sumthin', bein' most unexpected like, it's reether surprisin'. Well, sir, one of them fellers, he axes:

"'D'ye know wot ship this is?' he sez.

"'In course we do,' we answers.

"Sez he, 'Wot is it?'

"Sez I, 'It's the British frigate *Endimmon.*'

"Then sez he, 'You know wot she done?' sez he.

"'Wot's she done?' sez I.

"'W'y, this is the ship, the werry same ship as licked yer ship *President* in 1812,' sez he. 'We licked her good, too,' he continoos, sort of sneerin' like; w'ich I wasn't there an' didn't hev nuthin' to say, but Powers here, sumthin' struck him all of a

suddint like, to our great surprise, an' he opens his mouth.

"An' may I be triced up ef this time the man he actooly sez sumthin'. Shiftin' his quid, he sez, slow-like, an' everybody was a-listenin', too.—They'd done a deal of laughin', them Britishers, arter they said they'd licked our *President*, an' they wus a-waitin' fer our answer.—Powers drawls out:

"'Ye must ha' done a deal of repairin' to her sence that day you licked our *President*,' sez he. 'An,' sez he, 'I wus on the *President* that day an' I recollect well that you didn't hev a gun left that you could fire. There warn't a sail that you could set, the masts wus knocked clean out'n ye. You wus a-layin' like a log in the water helpless,' sez he, 'an' we wus so contemchuous of ye,' sez he, 'that we jest turned up our stern to ye like a mule that kicks ye in the face, an' dash my wig, ye never fired a gun at us! We poked a few shot inter ye arter that an' sailed away 'cause you had some friends comin' down to take a look at us, w'ich the biggest wus a razee, an' we didn't hev nobody but ourselves. You wus a poor-lookin' wictor that night,' sez he, 'an' so,' sez he, 'ye must have fixed yer old hulk up putty considerable sence the day ye say ye licked us.'

"Well, sir," continued old Ben, throwing his head back again and roaring with laughter in which all but Powers joined, "I never knowed a-fore that Sam Powers could talk like that, an' I sartainly never knowed a-fore that he had the makin' of an

o-ray-ter in him. That wus more speechifyin' than he ever done in his life, I takes it. W'y, sir, he jest guv it to 'em like a sea lawyer, an' then we ups and yells an' cheers an' laughs, an' them fellers wus that aggreeviated that they dared us to come aboard through their ports an' hev it out, an' they'd show us how the *Endimmon* could fight! An' we wus a-sayin' they'd need another ship when we got through with 'em.

"'W'y,' sez I, 'you've heerd this man talkin? Well, you'd ought to see him fight. Him, with a few men like myself to back him, could clean out the whole gang on ye,' sez I. 'W'y, there's a lad in the starn sheets there,' sez I, pointin' to Nutter, 'an' ef you pick out a big boatswain's mate as measures about a fathom high, we'll match that youngster agin him, an' arter that boy's through with him, he'll take any two on ye.'

"They wus that mad they could hardly talk, an' they cussed an' swore, an' by an' by the 'Jimmy-Legs' [master-at-arms] come along, an' he sort of ca'med 'em down, an' you called fer a boat, an' that's all, sir."

"I didn't think it was in you, Powers," said Mr. Parker, amid the general laughter, with which Ben's recital was greeted.

"No, sir," returned the sailor solemnly, for he was as melancholy as he was silent.

The wags among the crew used to say that having to listen to old Ben Griffin day in and day out as

he chose to do, was enough to make him melancholy and miserable.

"But you answered him in good shape," continued the lieutenant.

"And it's true, sir," broke in Denton, "I've heard Commodore Decatur, who was a great friend of my father's, you know, Mr. Parker——"

"One of his godfathers when your father was picked up at sea, I've heard. Yes, I know the story," said Mr. Parker.

The early adventures of Commodore Denton, Ned's famous father, were well known in the navy then.

"Yes, sir, I've often heard him tell my father about that fight," said the midshipman. "They had the *Endymion* knocked into a cocked hat. There was no fight left in her. If he had been alone Commodore Decatur would have taken her to a moral certainty, but he had to leave her, and the *President*, having been badly shattered in the fight, the other ships overhauled him."

"Yes, I was at a dinner in London a few years ago, as an aid to old Commodore Bainbridge, who was one of the guests, and this same kind of rot about the *Endymion* taking the *President* was talked about," said Mr. Parker. "Finally old Admiral Collier, an Englishman, put a stop to it by blurting out that there was nothing in the story, that the *President* was not taken by the *Endymion*, but was actually mobbed by a heavy squadron and surrendered to them. So Powers was quite right in his reply."

CHAPTER IV

CUTTING OUT THE *CREOLE*

During this conversation the boat had been swiftly approaching the brig. These men were taking their lives in their hands in an expedition which promised fearful hazards, yet they could laugh and joke as if there were nothing more threatening before them than a mid-watch. Mr. Parker encouraged them in it. It isn't a good thing to dwell on the dangers of an enterprise after you have embarked upon it and have to carry it through. It is all right to consider the perils carefully before you do embark, but when once you are in a thing there is nothing to do but put all thought of danger out of mind and go ahead.

They were near enough now to render it necessary for them to be quiet and cautious. Mr. Parker gave them a few final directions. They had observed from the light and the tide that they were approaching the brig bows on, and the lieutenant determined to board that way. The vessel appeared to be heavily laden and sat low in the water, so that it would be easy to board her over the bows. If an

anchor watch were kept the man would probably be aft, and thus the boarding party would be apt to meet less resistance forward.

"Pay attention, all," he said. "Mr. Denton, you and Griffin and Chaffen will go down the fore-hatch. Secure the men in the fok's'l, then let the two men bring the prisoners on deck while you kindle a fire in the fore-hold. Mr. Hynson, you and Brice go down the main-hatch. Make your fire in the main-hold. Powers and Nutter will come with me to the cabin. Let no one make unnecessary noise. Only the officers will carry pistols, which are not to be fired if it can possibly be avoided. The men will have their cutlasses. Now avast rowing a bit, get your fire stuff ready. Look to your weapons. Chaffen, it seems to me that your oar is making an unusual lot of noise. Take a look at its wrapping."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You understand, gentlemen, that we can't afford to lose a second?"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the two young midshipmen promptly, as they tightened their belts and looked to their weapons.

"If any hails are made let no one answer but myself."

"Very good, sir."

"Are you all ready?"

"All ready, sir," came from the four men in the boat.

"Give way, then, and softly. Don't say another word!"

On the brig a negligent lookout was kept. Indeed, fancying themselves absolutely safe, anchored as they were close under the walls of so tremendous a fortress as San Juan de Ulloa, the only enemy in sight being the little American brig nearly a league away, everybody had turned in below except one man, who leaned over the rail aft smoking. A few yards away a sentry paced the parapet of the fort.

There was no moon, and some light clouds obscured the stars, making the night intensely dark. The Americans could scarcely make out the outlines of the brig beneath her riding lights. The boat approached very softly. The oars, handled by experts such as these seamen, were making scarcely a sound. In fact, observing that the tidal current would carry them in the direction they desired to go, Mr. Parker signed to the men to cease rowing, and in perfect silence they drifted slowly down toward the doomed ship.

As they approached, Chaffen, the starboard bow-oarsman, leaving his oar, which was fastened inboard by a lanyard, rose and caught the bob-stay of the brig as they swept under her bows, and held on firmly. The force of the tide was very gentle and the boat swung around softly, and, being fended off by the hands of the officers aft, touched the bows of the brig without making a sound. It was the work of a few seconds to fasten the cutter's painter securely

to the dolphin-striker and then for all to scramble aboard, beginning with Mr. Parker.

The officers had taken off their shoes and stockings in the boat, the men, of course, had been barefoot all the time. As noiselessly as cats they quickly carried out their appointed plans. Denton, with Chaffen and Griffin, dropped through the forward scuttle into the forecastle. A dim oil-lantern was burning in the dingy space between decks, by which they made out four men sleeping in berths on either side and a fifth lying in a hammock. This man was not asleep, for as the Americans dropped through the scuttle he tumbled out of his hammock, seized a pistol from the top of a chest, and pointed it at the midshipman, who was in the lead.

Before he could fire it, however, old Griffin ran him through the throat with a fierce thrust of his cutlass, and the man instantly fell to the deck dead. Not a word had yet been spoken, and very little noise had been made, yet the Mexican seamen awoke at the fall of their shipmate, and found themselves confronted by the three Americans. Denton with pistol in one hand, sword in the other, the other two men with drawn cutlasses. Before any of them could open their mouths, the midshipman who knew a little Spanish, sternly bade them be silent if they valued their lives.

Driving them out of their bunks and huddling them forward into the very eyes of the ship with the two seamen to guard them, Ned Denton seized the

hanging lantern, opened the scuttle beneath his feet, dropped down into the fore-peak, gathered into a heap what loose stuff he could find in the darkness, dropped the tarred oakum, which Chaffen passed down to him, upon it, blew out the light, poured the oil contained in the lantern on the heap, struck a match and touched it off. It blazed furiously in an instant. He scrambled up into the forecastle, not without getting scorched, and found the Mexicans in an agony of terror of the flames on one hand, and the seamen on the other, for the two men had been amusing themselves by making ferocious passes at the bewildered captives with their cutlasses.

Sending the two men on deck to receive the prisoners, Denton bade the Mexicans follow them, again cautioning them to make no noise on pain of instant death. Then taking a last look to see that the fire which he had started in the fore-hold was burning fiercely, he scrambled on deck, leaving the dead man alone in the forecastle.

Meanwhile, amidships, Hynson had met with a sad accident. There was some loose oil, leakage from a cask, in the main-hold where he had kindled his fire, which he had not observed in the darkness, and the instant he applied the match he was enveloped in flames. Both arms were badly burned. Brice, a gigantic seaman, gathered him up in his arms and carried him on deck. Although the boy was suffering frightful torture, from which he could

get no relief under the circumstances, he bit his lip and did not make a sound. Fortunately, these two had not met any men, as that portion of the brig was given over to her cargo.

Mr. Parker, with Powers and Nutter, had easily gained possession of the cabin. The man aft had turned as they approached him silently and uttered an exclamation of surprise at the sight of the three men. Before he could make another sound, Powers, who was as prompt as he was silent, sprung upon him, striking him a fearful blow in the jaw with his clenched fist, which knocked him senseless. As he fell the man seized the Mexican by the shoulder and waist-belt and coolly hurled him overboard. This transaction, however, had not been accomplished without some little noise. The sentry passing by in the darkness on the parapet, a short distance away, suddenly hailed.

"What's that?" he cried. "What's wrong aboard the brig?"

Mr. Parker instantly replied in perfect Spanish, of which he was a past master:

"One of my men is drunk, and I am disciplining him. It's all right, pay no attention."

He held his breath for a moment, but the answer apparently satisfied the sentry, and the lieutenant and Powers and Nutter plunged down the companion-way into the cabin. They mastered the two officers of the brig without difficulty, kindled their fire in the spirit-room and the lazarette and came on

deck. The Americans had been scarcely two minutes on the brig and were masters of her. The three fires which had been kindled, being far below, were not visible yet, but they would soon be seen from the fort as they gained headway. They had no time to lose, but Mr. Parker ran forward, satisfying himself personally that the work had been done well, and that the brig was doomed, before he abandoned her. Then he bade his men get into their boat.

"What'll we do with these, sir?" whispered Denton to him.

"We'll take them back as prisoners," answered Mr. Parker, pistol in hand, ordering them into the boat whither Brice, Chaffen, and Hynson preceded them. The terrified Mexicans tumbled down on the thwarts and seized the oars as they were directed. The remainder of the Americans followed, and covered the Mexicans with their pistols which they resumed as they entered the boat.

After seeing them all aboard her Mr. Parker bade them give way. He was astonished at the alacrity with which he was obeyed, until he learned, by inquiry from the prisoners, that the doomed vessel was laden with powder and military stores, including a few barrels of oil. In fact, she was a floating torpedo. The Mexicans, therefore, were just as anxious as were their captors to get away from the brig, and they pulled manfully at the oars.

By this time the light of the burning vessel was

seen on the fort. The sentry hailed again and discharged his musket. The alarm was beaten and the garrison came running to their stations. The fire had spread generally throughout the hold now, and was beginning to show above the decks. Although they pulled hard the cutter was still perilously near, so much so, that Brice and Powers each seized a spare oar and assisted the Mexican prisoners.

The brig was now roaring like a furnace, lighting the ocean for a mile around. They were out of musket range, but within easy cannon shot. Someone on the walls caught sight of the cutter. Instantly a flash of light lanced out from the nearest bastion followed by the roar of a heavy piece of ordnance. The shot, however, did not come anywhere near them. The Mexicans were execrable gunners, and though the Americans were under the fire of the battery for some time they were not hit, although several shot fell near enough to splash the boat with water.

Just out of gunshot of the fort the *Somers* was beating to and fro. There was a flare on her forecastle by which they could have detected her, even if the light from the burning brig had not rendered her clearly visible. Presently Captain Semmes, who had been most anxiously searching the sea, caught sight of the boat. She was now just within hailing distance.

"Boat ahoy!" he shouted.

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Mr. Parker.

The Brig was now Roaring Like a Furnace

"Are you all there, Mr. Parker?" cried the captain, recognizing the voice of his subordinate.

"Ay, all safe, sir. We've taken six prisoners, killed two, and burned the brig."

"I see you have," answered the captain. "Is anyone wounded?"

"Only Mr. Hynson, sir, badly burned."

"I'll be all right in a few days, sir," cried Hynson, bravely, who, with heroic resolution, had never uttered a groan or made a sound, although his hands and arms were in a pitiable state.

The *Somers* was promptly hove to, and the boat dashed alongside. The Mexican prisoners were ordered aboard, followed by the officers and men, except poor Hynson, who was left in the boat, the falls were hooked on, and the cutter was smartly run up to the davits, the yards swung, and the brig gathered way.

This time she ran down past the *Endymion*, whose crew were enjoying the spectacle of the burning ship. Captain Lambert was standing on the poop as the *Somers* dashed up.

"*Somers*, ahoy!" he called.

"Ahoy the frigate!"

"That was handsomely done," said Lambert.

"Thank you, sir," answered Semmes.

"I never dreamed of such a thing when your men were aboard here."

"I am glad to hear it. We didn't intend you should."

"That was a fine cask of sherry, Captain Semmes, you sent me."

"Glad you liked it, sir."

"Yes, but the next time don't use me as a base of attack."

"There won't be another time," answered Semmes, "we don't intend to let another one get away from us."

Amid a tremendous burst of cheers from the English ship the *Somers* shot past the *Endymion*. The next moment, with a roar that might have been heard for miles, the unfortunate brig, which they found from the captives was named the *Creole*, blew up.

"Well, I reckon we have done about enough for to-night, Mr. Parker. We'll run down to the anchorage, bring the ship to, and set the watches. I want to congratulate you all. It was one of the most brilliant things that I ever saw done. The commodore shall hear of you all, gentlemen. Tell the purser to serve out a large tot of grog to the men of the cutting-out party, and give them an all-night-in, all of them. Mr. Denton, it is a proud man your father will be when he hears how you are following in his footsteps. Hynson, my lad, the steerage is a poor place for a young reefer burned up like you. I have a spare berth in my cabin, let the doctor look after you there."

"Three cheers for Captain Semmes and the United States brig *Somers*," broke out Griffin, trilling his pipe as a signal and leading the men in the cheering.

CHAPTER V

BEN GRIFFIN'S YARN

THEIR splendid exploit in cutting out and burning the *Creole* furnished ample subject for conversation on the *Somers* for several days. So far as the weather permitted, that is, for it came on to blow violently the next morning a furious "norther," and the brig, unequal to facing such a storm from causes hereafter mentioned, had run down under the lee of Verde Island to get such shelter from the gale as was possible. On so small a ship there was no place where either officers or men could congregate except on the spar-deck, and in bad weather the discomfort of their situation was extreme.

The clear space between decks on the brig was only four feet ten inches, and this was diminished six inches by the thickness of the beams supporting the spar-deck at the usual intervals. The steerage was about two feet higher amidships, and the wardroom and captain's cabin abaft everything were still higher, owing to the fact that what was known as a "trunk," a low deck-house, was raised above them. Therefore, in no case, neither on the

berth-deck nor in the steerage, the wardroom, nor captain's cabin, except as the "trunk" permitted it, in these latter, was there space enough for a man of average height to stand upright.

The officers and crew ate and slept between decks, and that was all. The rains that succeeded the "norther" soon drenched every stitch of spare clothing in spite of sou'westers, oilskins, and tarpaulins, and for five or six days everybody was supremely miserable. They ate in wet clothes, slept in wet hammocks or damp berths, and even in the most inclement weather were forced to spend most of the time on deck.

During all this time they did not see a sail of any sort, although if any vessel had sought to enter the port it would not have been possible for the *Somers* to prevent her. There was nothing to break the monotony of their discomfort, therefore, even drills and quarters being suspended. They could only stand around in disconsolate groups, blaming the wind and rain in language more forcible than polite.

About the last of November the gale broke as suddenly as it had burst upon them. The sun came out brilliantly, and the captain promptly took advantage of the opportunity to get the wet stuff on board dried out. The sails were loosed and left hanging in the brails, buntlines, and clewlines. Long lines with hammocks, bedding and clothing stoppered to them, were run from mast to mast

and from yard-arm to yard-arm. The hatches and dead-lights were opened to give the warm, fresh air free play throughout the ship.

The encumbered condition of affairs made it impossible for drills to be resumed that day, and the exhausted state of the crew rendered it inexpedient anyway. The men's bags and ditty boxes were broken out, and everything received a thorough overhauling. In the fierce sunlight of the semi-tropic latitude the things were soon dried, the clothes were piped down and the hammocks were stowed away in the nettings during the first dog-watch, and before the men were piped to supper the little brig was her own trim self once more.

After supper was Jack's own hour before the hammocks were piped down and the night watch called. Warm, dry, well-fed; smoking pipes of strong, black, navy tobacco, popularly known as "nigger head," they passed a pleasant hour before turning in. Forward on the forecastle deck old Ben Griffin, with Powers, Chaffen, Brice and some of the other privileged worthies of the ship, were exchanging yarns and swapping experiences. Two or three of the midshipmen, enjoying the privileges of the hour, as was the custom of the young gentlemen of the day, were gathered around the group listening. The rest of the men were sprawled in the gangway or leaning over the booms and boats amidships. Aft on the leeside of the quarter-deck the older officers were gathered chatting, and still farther aft Cap-

tain Semmes stood in the lonely isolation of the commander of a ship, staring toward the lights of Vera Cruz and the castle.

Naturally the talk turned on the recent cutting out expedition, which, in a small way, had been a brilliant feat of arms. Those who had been lucky enough to participate, gave themselves a great many airs over those who had been unable, although with the best heart in the world to do it, to join with the others.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Denton," said old Griffin, from where he sat on the riding-bitts, "but I axes ye how is Mr. Hynson?"

"He's having a rough time, Ben," answered Denton, "the fact is he was a great deal more injured than we supposed. He got his jacket all greasy carrying that waste, and when the fire he made flashed up, his clothes were burned off his arms. If it hadn't been for Brice's quick work he'd probably have been burned to death."

"He's kept close in the cap'n's cabin ever sence we come back, ain't he, sir?" asked Chaffen, the captain of the forecastle.

"Yes," answered Clarke, another midshipman, "'Pills'—the doctor, I mean—has kept him laid up by the heels in the berth. They've got his arms parcelled and served, and he's carrying them in a sling."

"He suffers a good deal from the shock, I reckon," said Rogers, another midshipman.

"Yes, naturally," assented Denton.

"He never guv a sound or made a cry," said Brice, who was captain of the hold. "W'en I seed them flames a-flashin' up I made a grab at him, an' I opens my mouth an' sez—well, I didn't say nuthin', but I was jest a-goin' to yell, w'en he sez, sez he, 'Belay that. Don't make no sound.' Fortunate there was a piece of canvas layin' by me w'ich I clapped aboard of him, er I'd burnt myself as bad as him. I reckon he'd hev fainted ef it hadn't been fer the pain, an' w'en I kerried him up on deck he jest bit his lips, set his teeth, an' never groaned onct."

"That wus hansom work of your'n," said old Ben Griffin, "you didn't hev much time to think."

"Didn't hev no time 't all."

"But ye didn't hev to think," continued the boatswain's mate; "true sailormen ain't no thinkers. There's no time fer delib'ratin' ner counsels o' war on a ship in an e—wot's the word, sir?—emergency? Thank-ee, sir. True sailormen ain't no thinkers."

The little group of midshipmen laughed heartily at this solemn statement by the old seaman.

"Now, young gentlemen," returned Ben, undismayed, "ye knows wot I means. A soger, now, he kin set down an' delib'rate on wot he's goin' to do. Then he kin go off calm like an' do it, ef so be he's able. He's got no lee shore, he's got no reefs, he's got no gear to kerry away, he's got no squalls to look out fer, he never gits took aback in a gale o' wind. It's all plain sailin' with him, but a

sailorman's different. W'en he's got to do anythin' he's got to do it right now. He don't hev no time to think. I've heerd tell that them French fellers, like yer father used to fit in 1800, Mr. Denton, is the greatest thinkers in the world. They knows more about the the-o-ree of sailin' ships than does enybody on the water. But w'en it comes to sailin' of 'em they nacherally don't know how to do it. Ye see, mates, a man wot's a reel sailor is got to know enough to do jest the right thing at the right time, an' not because he kin delib'rate over it. He's got to know it by—in—in—wot's the dum word, Mr. Ned, enyway? I ain't much in the language bisness, bein' a silent man with no use fer meny words,—but a sailorman must have the in—is it insect?"

"Instinct, Ben," said Denton, laughing.

"That's it. You're mighty smart, Mr. Denton. Well, he's got to hev the in—instinct in him or he'll never be a sailor. So that's w'y I sez sailormen don't hev no time to think, true sailormen, that is. You kin set there now, young gents, an' think about wot ye'd do if you wus took aback, or ef there wus a man overboard, or breakers wus reported ahead, or ef you wus druv on a lee shore, but w'en the time comes fer to do it ye've got no time to think, ye must do it, an' mighty quick! It jest sort o' comes nacheral, an' ye does it without knowin' how or w'y, an' ef you don't ye ain't no true sailorman. Ain't I right, shipmates?"

"Right's a trivet," assented Chaffen, "wot d'ye think about it, Powers?"

"Umph," said that worthy, solemnly nodding his head.

"Well, that's about as near as you gener'ly comes to a speech, Sam Powers," continued Griffin, "though I must say yer remarks to them *Endimmon* fellers wus most e-elokent. The cap'n's ownself couldn't hev did it better—eh, Mr. Denton?"

"I should say not," heartily assented Denton, relating the story to the great delectation of the auditors.

"If Brice here had stopped to think on that berth-deck with Mr. Hynson," resumed old Ben, "bein' as I knows him to be a slow thinker, Mr. Hynson would 'a' been burnt to a crisp afore he'd done enythin'."

"Ye mought be right, Ben. I can't think as fast as ye kin talk noways," said Brice, gravely.

"Well, putting out a fire on a midshipman's arms is not part of the ordinary duty of a sailor, is it?" asked Clarke.

"Mr. Clarke,' said Ben, solemnly, "ye never can tell jest wot a midshipman's goin' to do an' wot a sailorman that looks arter him will hev to do fer him. Ye may hev to put out a fire on him, or not; besides, a sailorman's got to do everythin', an' he kin do everythin', 'ceptin' ride a horse an' run a farm. There never wus a sailor man wot didn't make up his mind that soon as his cruisin' days

wus over, he wus goin' to take his money an' buy a farm an' settle down, an' there never wus one of 'em that done it."

"That's right, Ben," came in chorus from the seamen in the forecastle.

"Speaking o' midshipmen," continued the sailor, settling himself for a yarn to which everybody prepared to listen, "I remembers two midshipmen I knowed werry well onct. We wus on a sloop-of-war, the *Yorktown*, on the North Afr'can coast huntin' slavers. Them two young reefers—I begs your pardon, young gents——"

"Oh, go ahead, that's all right, Ben," said Denton, speaking for the rest.

"Well, them two reefers in the steerage didn't seem to be on good terms. That place wusn't big enough to hold 'em both. They wus a disagreein' all the time, an' none of us never could find out wot the reason wus. I suspicions they didn't know theirselves. Enyway, they took opposite sides of the deck all the way from New York, an' it wus a mighty long v'y'ge over, too. They wus jest a-waitin' till they could find some conwenient place ashore to hev it out with pistols in wot they called a 'dool,' w'ich wus a good name for it, I takes it.

"Well, sirs, we had the greatest luck on that cruise ye ever seed. The fust thing we run into in the mouth of one of them rivers over there wus two brigs that wus plain slavers. They belonged to different parties, but happened to meet at the same

place, an' they wus both doin' a rushin' bisness. We caught 'em in the werry act, an' there wus no defendin' of theirselves, they couldn't say nuthin', so they owned up.

"They wus hansom brigs, much of the same size an' lines an' 'bout twice as big as this little hooker we are a-sailin' in. W'ether that cap'n of our'n knowed them two young fellers wus a-spoilin' fer a fight we didn't know, anyways it looked like it, fer he ordered them brigs back to the United States as prizes an' he put one midshipman on one, and t'other midshipman on t'other, with a small prize crew on each. He sent me with one of them young gents, bein' as I wus a man with experience in everythin', 'ceptin' the art of navigation, w'ich is how I comes to know so much about them two young gents.

"We cleaned the niggers out, w'ich there wusn't many of 'em, but the cap'n he took a deck-load of 'em with the *Yorktown* up the coast somew'eres an' dumped 'em free w'ere they wouldn't be sold agin. We made our preparations, both crews workin' like mad to see w'ich would git reddy fust, an' it happened both got reddy to weigh anchor 'bout the same time. Jest afore we got under way, however, my midshipman cap'n he calls a boat an' is rowed over to the other ship. When he come to the gangway of the other brig he sez to me:

"'Ye come with me. I want ye fer a second.'

"So I follers him up the battens an' we steps on

deck. He braces hisself up, throws out his little chest, an' s'lutes the deck, walks up to the other man, an' sez, sez he, in a formal an' perlite sort of way:

"'Ye knows, Mr. Smith,—w'ich his name wusn't Smith, but I'll call him that,—' ye knows, Mr. Smith, that we've had a little difference that hasn't been settled between us?'

"'I knows it, Mr. Brown'—w'ich it warn't his name nuther, but I'll call him that.

"'Well,' sez Mr. Brown, 'ef we could git ashore we'd settle the thing like the gents we is.'

"'We would,' sez Mr. Smith.

"'Ye know,' sez Mr. Brown, 'we've both got to take these boats back to the United States, an' it don't look as if we're goin' to hev a chanct at each other till we git thar, under these succumstances.'

"'Ye're right again, Mr. Brown,' sez Mr. Smith.

"'It won't do fer us to go ashore to fight it out,' continoos Mr. Brown.

"''T won't,' sez Mr. Smith. 'But we don't want to wait till we git to New York to settle it. I'm so mad to hev it out that I kin hardly wait,' sez Mr. Smith.

"'Hev ye anythin' to perpose?' axes Mr. Brown.

"'I hev not,' answers Mr. Smith, werry perlite like.

"'Well,' sez Mr. Brown, 'seein's the wind's fair fer us to run out of the river mouth without no

trouble, I'll go out fust, an' w'en I gits a league off shore so's to be on the high seas, an' beyond Afr'can joorisdiction,'—my that's a long word, mates, an' it don't mean much noway, fer there wusn't no joorisdiction in Africa, 'ceptin' niggers—' I'll heave to my ship an' wait fer ye. W'en ye git out I'll fill away on the port tack, givin' you time to fill away on the starboard. Then as our brigs pass we kin exchange shots.'

"'That's a good idear,' sez Mr. Smith, 'but I think I kin improve on it a little.'

"'How's that?'

"'Instid of standin' on the decks to exchange shots, w'ich we mought hit one of the men, I'll stand on my weather fore-yard-arm, an' you stand on your lee fore-yard-arm, each one of us with a single-barrel pistol. W'en we're abreast each other we'll fire at will.'

"'That's an excellent idear,' sez the other man, 'we'd ought to hev seconds though.'

"'We suttenly ought to,' sez Mr. Smith.

"'I've brought mine along,' sez Mr. Brown; 'it's old Ben Griffin. Ye kin take another of the seamen fer your'n. We've got no men of our own rank aboard, so we'll make them blue-jackets do.'

"'Gents,' sez I, 'beggin' yer pardon, but I don't want nuthin' to do with sech perceedin's. I ain't no doolist an' I don't approve of sech things. W'y, sirs, if I has a disagreement with a ship-mate, I ups an' licks him with my fists right then an' thar, er he

licks me, w'ich is more infrequent, but this yer shootin' at each other——'

"'Mr. Ben Griffin,' sez Mr. Brown, werry calm like, but I sees he wus mighty mad, 'wot are you enyway?'

"'Bo's'n's mate on the *Yorktown*, sir,' I replies, techin' my cap.

"'W'ere are ye now?'

"'I'm attached to the prize crew on this yer brig,' I sez.

"'Who is your commander?'

"'I guess you are, sir.'

"'Very well, then, I detail you as second in this dool. To be disobejent is mutiny, sir!'

"In course, arter that, I had nuthin' to do but obey. Orders is orders, an' so long as he details me as a second in that dool I suppose I had to do wot he wanted. Well, Mr. Smith he detailed Jack Trysail, fer his second, an' them two gents an' us two blue-jackets got our heads together an' planned.

"I wus to steer one brig, Trysail wus to steer t'other. Bein' as they wus the only navigators on the ships it was agreed that if one of them young gentlemen wus knocked out, that Trysail or me, w'ichever it wus, would keep company with the other brig an' foller right along. It wus a mighty ticklish piece of bisness, fer them two young hotheads wus not only riskin' their own lives, but the two brigs. But they wus that mad with fight that

they jest couldn't do nuthin' till they had that fight out.

"Well, Trysail an' me got so worked up about that fight arter a w'ile that we come near blazin' away at each other with our fists, w'ich our young cap'ns said it wusn't in kordance with the code—wotever that wus. Well, sirs, we rowed back to our own brig, an' w'en I got aboard I tells the rest of the men w'ile we wus makin' ready to git under way. They tuk to it like fire to a powder-magazine. There wus some whisperin' for'ard, an' jest as we passed by t'other brig, I yells out to old Trysail:

"'We've got a half-bucket of dollars,' sez I, liftin' up one of them leather fire-buckets, 'w'ich we'll bet on our cap'n.'

"'We take you,' sez old Trysail werry prompt.

"'We'll settle w'en we git to New York,' sez I.

"'All right,' sez he.

"Jest then Mr. Brown comes up that mad he couldn't skurcely speak.

"'Wot d'ye mean?' he sez, 'by makin' a wager in an affair of honor? Can't two gentlemen settle their differences on the high seas,' sez he, 'without a lot of blue-jackets puttin' up their money on 'em? I've a great mind not to fight at all,' sez he.

"My, but he wus mad; but we thought if they had to fight we mought as well hev sum fun out'n it. He couldn't back out enyway, there wus nuthin' else to do, there wus no way to stop the fight, 'cause we wus out of hailin' distance of the other brig.

Well, we run out an' hove to an' waited fer t'other brig. She come out in fine style an' run down to the south'ard of us, braced sharp up on the starboard tack, an' then we run off on the port tack.

"'Now, Griffin,' sez Mr. Brown, 'I want you to pass that other brig to leeward. Hold her stiddy as a church, as stiddy as ye kin, that is, until we're right abreast of her. I've writ letters to my payrents an' you'll find them in the cabin,' he sez; 'good-by.'

"My, he wus a brave young feller, that midshipman wus. He wus as haughty w'en he said good-by as if he wus commander of a fleet of 74s. Then he runs for'ard an' clambers up the foreshrouds an' runs out to the weather fore-yard-arm, our crew a-cheerin' like mad as they seed him go up, w'ich he waved his hand like an emperor. Mr. Smith wus doin' the same thing on t'other brig.

"We took a good full an' made a wide circle alterin' the courses of the two brigs, by instinct, w'ich I told you of a minute sence, so's we'd git room to pass each other broadside to. We wus both of us goin' a little free. I wanted to stare up at my cap'n, but I never took my eyes off that ship. Ye know, gentlemen, that I kin steer a ship with eny man that walks timber or pulls spokes, an' dash my wig, ef I ever done better than that time! Old Trysail he wus an expert, too, an' them two ships, the wind bein' gentle an' the sea smooth, wus as stiddy as rocks.

"Mr. Brown he wus a standin' straight up, his left hand holdin' the leech of the sail behind his back—an' you bet I'd mast-headed that topsail so that the leech set straight an' true—with his right hand holding his pistol. He didn't say nuthin' and nuther did Mr. Smith. Pretty soon we wus reddy to pass each other. We wus goin' at a fair rate of speed, too, the head booms wus beginnin' to lap, an' then the bows, then the yard-arms, an' 'Crack!' went the two pistols in an instant.

"Haul my bo'lin's! gents an' shipmates, I jest turned sick in a minute w'en I seed Mr. Smith pitch for'ard from the yard an' fall between the brigs. The same instant the topsail-sheet on the other brig parted an' the sail flapped an' thrashed in the breeze. Then I looked fer our Mr. Brown. He wus still standin' straight up on the yard, his smokin' pistol in his hand. Both gentlemen had fired to onct. Mr. Brown wus whiter than I ever seed a midshipman afore or sence.

"'Are ye hurt, Mr. Brown?' I called.

"He didn't answer. Jest throwed that pistol in the water an' took a header off that yard, an' it looked fer a minute as ef we wus goin' to lose both our young cap'ns. Things wus ruther serious. I'm no navigator, but I'm a prime seaman, though I sez it as I shouldn't. I hove my brig to, w'ich old Jack Trysail done the same with his, an' we had two boats out in a jiffy in the open sea. We both got to the two figgers that wus strugglin' in the water at the

same time. Mr. Smith wus layin' free in the water an' Mr. Brown wus a-holdin' him up. Trysail hauled his cap'n into his boat an' I hauled my cap'n into my boat.

"'Are ye hurt, Mr. Smith?" sez Mr. Brown, proud-like.

"'No, not at all,' sez Mr. Smith, 'ceptin' the water I swallered.'

"'How come you to fall from the yard-arm then?'

"'Yer shot, w'ich it was blame badly aimed,' sez Mr. Smith, 'must ha' cut away the topsail-sheet an' the flappin' of the sail pitched me off,' he sez. 'Are ye hurt, Brown?' he axes.

"'Not at all,' sez Mr. Brown.

"'An' how come ye into the water?' he axes again.

"'W'y I seed you fall,' sez Mr. Brown, 'an' I knowed ye couldn't swim—so I—I jumped, you know.'

"He stopped werry awk'ard-like, a-blushin' painful.

"'An' w'ere did my bullet go?' sez Mr. Smith, lookin' surprised-like, and tryin' to speak indifferent.

"'I don't know,' sez Mr. Brown, 'I didn't see nuthin' of it.' Then he sez, 'Do you want another shot, sir?'

"'Another shot?' sez Mr. Smith. 'D'ye think I want another shot at the man wot saved my life? Ef it hadn't been fer you,' he sez, 'I would hev been drownded, fer I can't swim, as ye knows.'

"'Tis a dooty of humanity to save life,' sez Mr. Brown, werry grand-like.

"'Put it that way, if you like,' sez Mr. Smith. 'Perhaps this water has cooled my arjer. I disremember jest wot we fit about, but ef I'm wrong I apologize.'

"'I don't recall it myself,' sez Mr. Brown, meltin' a little hisself, 'but perhaps it wus due to my hasty temper, an' I apologize.'

"'No, I wus wrong.'

"'I insist.'

"'Dash it all,' sez Mr. Smith, 'you saved my life. Can't I get nuthin' out of this here affair?'

"'Well, we'll both apologize, an' shake hands,' sez Mr. Brown. 'An' we'll be good friends hereafter.'

"They took each other's hands and shook them heartily. It looked as if they'd like to hug each other.

"'Begs pardon, gents,' sez I, 'wot becomes of our half-bucket of dollars—w'ich wins?'

"'An' ours?' axes Trysail.

"'Ye keeps yer own bucket,' sez Mr. Brown to me.

"'An' ye keeps yer own bucket, too,' says Mr. Smith to Trysail.

"'Begs pardon, agin,' sez Trysail, 'bein' as we want a little fun out'n this yer bisness, wot do yer honors say to our layin' the half-bucket of dollars on which brig gets to New York fust?'

"'Done!' sez both cap'ns to onct. 'Half-bucket of dollars it is.'

"We didn't have no half-bucket of dollars, neither on us, but we knowed we'd git our money w'en we got to New York from our pay an' the prizes we took on this cruise.

"Well, we separated an' that wus the only dool I ever jined in. Ef it hadn't been fer Mr. Brown's quickness in divin' off that yard-arm, w'ich it wus the quickest work I ever seed, Mr. Smith'd been drownded, an' sumthin' serious would ha' happened. That's a sailorman's instinct every time."

"Which got in first, Ben?" asked Denton.

"We did—by four hours."

"Did you get your bucket of dollars?" queried Clarke.

"We had possession of it fer a few hours, sir, but warious enterprisin' gents on shore got the most on it, without no loss of time," said the old man, rising to his feet and making ready to call the watch as the bell struck eight.

CHAPTER VI

A TRAGEDY OF THE PAST

It was drizzling softly on the deck, and the midshipmen off duty were congregated around the table in the steerage. Eight bells had just struck, and they had an hour before the master-at-arms, on his rounds, would caution them that it was time to turn out the lights—"douse the glim," as the boys called it—and turn in. The brig was at anchor under the lee of Verde Island as usual, after cruising about all day. All the youngsters of the steerage mess were there except Rogers, who was on watch, and Hynson, who was still on the sick list, and confined to the cabin the captain had so kindly offered him. One or two of them were writing up their journals, some of them were busy over letters home, the others were reading, when Denton suddenly broke the silence.

"I say, fellows," he asked, "do you know what day this is?"

"The first of December," answered Delondes.

"Well, you know what anniversary that is."

"By George!" exclaimed the youngster who had spoken before, "so it is, and I never thought of it."

"Thought of what?" asked Jackson, the youngest reefer of the lot.

"Why," answered Delondes, looking hastily around, although who outside the steerage could possibly hear was not apparent, "the mutiny, you know."

"What mutiny?" asked Jackson, curiously.

"The mutiny on the *Somers* four years ago today. He was hanged, you remember."

"Oh," said Jackson, "of course I've heard about it. You mean the time they hung Phil Spencer."

"Yes."

"I knew Spencer slightly," said Denton. "He was a shipmate of mine on the *Columbus* when I was first appointed in '41. He was a tall, slender, melancholy looking lad. I never thought it was in him to mutiny."

"Had he not been rather a bad lot?" asked Clarke, another passed midshipman.

"He may have been, although I didn't know him well enough to say."

"I heard some talk that he was expelled from school at Albany, New York, and about some other troubles," said Clarke.

"They called him incorrigible, I think," continued Denton, "but he behaved himself well enough when I knew him on the *Columbus*. He was about like the rest of us."

"Well, he was a pretty hard case on the *Somers*," said Delondes, "there's no mistake about that. He

drank, and smoked to excess. He wasn't a good officer——"

"A fellow might be all that," interrupted Denton, "and not be a mutineer."

"Say, fellows," said Delondes, dropping his voice to a whisper, "I'll tell you something if you promise, on your honor, never to say a word about it to anybody."

"We promise!" cried the boys in a chorus.

"Well, then, I don't believe he was guilty," cried the midshipman, impressively.

"Lots of officers agree with you," said Denton, "but nobody much in the navy says anything about it. I once asked my father about it, and he got pretty mad when I did, I can tell you, but I couldn't get him to say anything about the rights or wrongs of it, or even to discuss it with me. No other officer of rank will either. I tried it on Mr. Parker one day, and he choked my luff severely."

"Yes," said Clarke, "and I spoke to Mr. Claiborne once and got a good dressing-down."

"Tell us about it, Delondes," said Jackson, "you were on the brig at the time."

"Well, you know," said the midshipman, "it isn't a subject that we like to discuss. I hate to think of it even. When I was ordered to this brig two months ago I did everything I could not to be sent back to her, I hated the sight of her. Something is going to happen to her, fellows, mark my

words. She'll not be a lucky ship with such a record."

"Well, heave ahead and let us hear about the mutiny," interrupted Jackson, impatiently.

"All right, but don't ever say a word about it as coming from me, and I'll tell you the story."

"I guess everybody's talking about it to-night anyway," interrupted Denton. "Did you see the men gathered in little knots every spare minute this afternoon, pointing up to the yard-arms and so on? Rogers told me that he had a hard time to get the men to go on lookout to-night. They say the old brig's haunted."

"It ought to be," burst out Delondes, "for it's my private opinion, gentlemen, that Spencer, Cromwell, and Small were murdered!"

He looked furtively about him in the darkness as he said the dreadful word. Everybody in the steerage was intensely interested by this time, the papers were pushed aside and the youngsters gathered closer to Delondes, while he told them the awful story of one of the most startling and disgraceful happenings in the naval history of America.

"Well, you know, fellows," he went on, "the *Somers* was a brand new brig just launched, four years ago, and she was selected to take a crew of apprentice boys on a practice cruise to the coast of Africa and back, incidentally carrying despatches. I was attached to her. We had for our captain Commander Alexander Slidell Mackenzie. The

officers included a lieutenant, Mr. Gansevoort, a passed assistant-surgeon, a purser, a passed midshipman acting as master, three midshipmen, and three acting midshipmen. I was one of the last and Spencer was another. I was the youngest officer on the ship, it being my first cruise.

"The first part of the cruise everything went well, although Spencer didn't make himself very popular in the steerage. He didn't have much to do with the rest of us, but spent most of his time forward with the men. He was most intimate with Cromwell, the chief bo's'n's mate, the biggest man on the ship and a fine seaman. Another of his cronies was a little man named Small, the captain of the maintop, but he was a pretty poor sort of a stick. We had a crew of about one hundred and thirty, all told, of whom nearly a hundred were apprentice boys. One night toward the last of November on our return voyage, Spencer took the purser's steward, a man named Wales, whom we all hated, out on the head-booms and urged him to join in a mutiny, which had for its object the seizure of the brig."

"Didn't he swear him to secrecy before he did this?" asked Denton.

"Of course he did."

"How did he happen to ask him?" questioned Clarke.

"Well, Wales and the captain had had some difficulty, and Spencer thought Wales had a grudge against the captain, and that he would be a likely

man for him on that account. Wales swore the most solemn oath and promised faithfully never to breathe what had been told him, but immediately he could, he told the purser the whole conversation, the purser told the first luff, and he told the captain. At first it amused the captain, who laughed at it as preposterous, but later on he got to thinking seriously over it. Then he armed the officers, sent for Spencer and arrested him. Spencer admitted that he had been talking with Wales about piracy, but said it was only a joke."

"Dangerous sort of a joke," commented Denton.

"I should say so," assented Clarke.

"Go on, Delondes," said Jackson, impatient at this interruption.

"Of course he should have been punished severely," continued the young narrator, "he was, as it turned out, but by this time the captain and everybody else thought he was in dead earnest, even though he persisted that it was only a joke. Poor Spencer was immediately put in double irons. Two days after Cromwell and Small were arrested. Suspicion was pointed at Small by something that Spencer had said, and by the fact that Wales had seen and heard them talking about the mutiny. Cromwell and Spencer were very intimate, and although there was no testimony to incriminate Cromwell, he was thought guilty also.

"Now, you know, there is no place on a brig of this size to confine prisoners, and keep them away

from the rest of the crew, so they put them in double irons on the quarter-deck. Spencer was kept near the arm-chest on one side of the deck and Cromwell and Small on the other. Seeing an officer in double irons on a ship's deck caused a lot of talk, naturally enough, especially among the apprentice boys. It was bad for discipline, and discipline hadn't been of the best since we left Madeira anyway. I don't know why, but it wasn't. The men, and especially the boys on the ship were very much excited; they didn't obey orders promptly, and persisted in collecting in little groups, breaking up when anybody came near.

"One night the main-topgallant mast carried away under suspicious circumstances and four other men were arrested and ironed and put aft on the quarter-deck with the other three. By this time everybody was in a frightful state of anxiety and apprehension. We didn't know what was going to happen next.

"Small confessed to the captain that he and Spencer had been talking about a mutiny, but Cromwell said that nobody had said a word to him about it, and that he did not say anything about it himself to anybody. He was kept in irons just the same.

"The captain got so worked up about the situation that at last he sent a letter to all the officers except the two acting midshipmen—I suppose he thought we were too young to be consulted. Well,

this letter convoked a council. The officers went below to the wardroom to consider what was to be done in the supposed emergency, leaving the captain and the two acting midshipmen on deck to guard the prisoners and overawe the crew. The captain had armed a few of the most dependable petty officers and stationed them aft with the three of us, including his clerk, making the greatest possible show of force in case a rescue was attempted.

"By this time the situation was so tense that you cannot imagine such a thing if you never passed through it. Everybody was thinking something was going to happen, though just what it was nobody could say. We were kept on duty all day and kept watch and watch at night. We got no sleep when we went below anyway.

"Were you frightened, Delondes?"

"Of course. Well, the officers deliberated all day, broke off for the night, and then went at it again the next morning. They had some of the crew and some of the petty officers in to testify, and they decided at last that the safety of the brig demanded that Spencer, Cromwell, and Small should be put to death. Cromwell and Small were both fairly well educated men. They knew the use of a sextant and were good navigators. Both of them had been mates in the merchant service. Cromwell was a man of fine address. These two, with Spencer, were the only persons, aside from the of-

ficers of the ship, who understood the art of navigation. If they were put out of the way, you know, the mutiny, if there was one, would fail, because there would be no one capable of navigating the brig left among the mutineers, and it was thought that the prompt punishment and execution of these three would terrify the rest of them. So the officers recommended that they be put to death."

"Great heavens!" said Denton, "weren't either of the accused present when they were being tried?"

"Not one of them. They were on that quarter-deck all the time. They didn't even know what was going on, except by guess-work."

"How could anybody guess anything like that?" asked Clarke.

"No one could, of course."

"Didn't they have a chance to make any statements even?" asked Jackson.

"Not a chance."

"And they had no opportunity to cross-examine the witnesses, or to tell their own story, to make any defence?" asked Denton.

"I tell you they didn't have a chance to do anything or say anything. They knew nothing of it, they were not there. It was all decided in their absence. The officers all signed the paper, saying they believed it would not be possible to take the brig into port with these men alive on her, and recommended their instant execution. As soon

as the captain got the paper he went over to Spencer and then to the other two, and told them he was going to hang them immediately."

"How did they take it?" asked Denton.

"Well, they took it differently. Spencer sank to his knees and covered his face with his hands. We never knew whether he was praying or not. Cromwell knelt down, lifted up his hands and swore that he was innocent, and wondered what would become of his wife. Spencer said that Cromwell was innocent, too, with his last words."

"What did Small say?" asked Jackson.

"Why, he said much the same thing, only he was the most composed of them all. Well, we set about making preparations to hang them at once. We fastened three whips to the main-yard-arm, one to starboard, two to port. Spencer and Small were to hang on one side, Cromwell on the other."

"Didn't Spencer make any protest?"

"Yes, I think he protested, but what was the use? The thing was settled and he knew he had to die, and he resolved to die bravely. He had plenty of pluck, whatever else he lacked. Captain Mackenzie went to him and asked him if he didn't want to write any message home. He tried to write, but could not, as his hands were ironed, and the captain said he would write for him. The captain refused to take the irons off his hands, and he was actually hanged in double irons. The captain first said he would give him ten minutes, but as a matter of fact

he was with him about an hour after he told him he was going to die."

"Didn't they have any religious services?" asked Jackson.

"They brought them each a Prayer Book and the Bible, and Spencer read something out of them. Spencer and the two men were then taken to the gangway and ordered to get upon the hammock cloths. Spencer and Small stood on either side of the port gangway, facing inboard, with Cromwell opposite them on the starboard side. Nooses were put around their necks and the whips were manned by the crew."

"Weren't their faces covered?" asked Clarke.

"Yes. Spencer's was covered with his black neckerchief, and the other men had shirts over their heads. The captain had arranged to beat the call for hoisting colors, then roll off, fire a gun, and whip them up to the yard-arm, and at the same time the colors were to be run up. The main-topman manned Small's whip, because he was captain of the main-top, the afterguard and idlers took hold of Spencer's, as he was a quarter-deck officer, and the forecastlemen tailed on to Cromwell's whip."

"Didn't Spencer say anything before he was covered?" asked Denton.

"Yes. He called on the first lieutenant to witness that he died like a brave man, and he certainly did. He had said something about having acted badly, too. That he deserved death for his many

sins. Not exactly a confession of mutiny, at least I would not call it so."

"Did the others say anything?" asked Rogers.

"Cromwell only protested his innocence again. The last thing he said was, 'Tell my wife I die an innocent man.' Small said a few words to the effect that he had never killed any man and never intended to. It was only for talking about mutiny and pirating that he stood there, and he cautioned us to take warning by his example, telling the men on the whip not to fumble or hesitate but to run him up quick."

"Didn't anyone say anything to Spencer?"

"Only Thompson. He was the only midshipman that spoke to him and bade him good-by."

"I honor him for that," said Denton.

"So do I," said Delondes, sadly. "I wish now I had done so myself."

There was a little pause in the steerage, broken only by the deep breathing of the interested and excited boys.

"Go on," said Denton at last.

"There isn't much more. Spencer had asked that he might give the word himself, and the captain granted his request. After everything was ready we waited. My heavens, fellows, you can't think how ghastly that silence was! Finally the boatswain's mate came running aft to the captain standing on the trunk, and said that Spencer couldn't give the word, would the captain give it himself? I will say that the captain was terribly affected.

The tears were rolling down his face—in fact, we were all crying."

"No shame to you, either," said Denton.

"Of course not. Well, the captain shouted out:

"'Fire!'

"Starboard gun number one roared out and before the sound died away I heard Mr. Gansevoort, the first luff, call out:

"'Whip!'

"The officers and petty officers, all heavily armed, were stationed at different points with instructions to shoot any man instantly if he let go the whips or didn't pull his best. Under these circumstances everybody did his best. They ran the men up to the yard-arms in a flash, at the same instant the colors were run up and broken out at the gaff end, after the falls were belayed. Captain Mackenzie mustered the crew, made them a speech, and called for three cheers for the American flag. They were given with a will, the crew looking into loaded pistols held in the hands of the officers and petty officers while they did it."

"What happened then?" asked Jackson.

"They left the bodies swinging there until after dinner. Then they lowered them. Cromwell and Small were sewed up in hammocks, and Spencer was put in a coffin made of two mess chests, weighted of course. Just as we were ready to bury them, a squall burst upon us and it was night before it was safe to go on with the burial service. We

mustered the crew, lighted the battle-lanterns, and every other lantern we had. Captain Mackenzie read the services from the Prayer Book, the officers and crew responding, and the three men were launched overboard at the proper time. That was the end of Spencer."

"Was there any more mutiny?" asked Denton.

"No. They kept the four remaining prisoners in irons until we reached New York. Nothing was done to them; they were released after a time. When we got into port and told our story there was a great excitement about it at once."

"I remember it," said Denton.

"Yes," said Clarke, "I do, too. I was on the *South Carolina* at the time."

"You know, of course," continued Delondes, "that Spencer was the son of the Secretary of War, and that his people were among the most distinguished in America, politically, socially, and in every way."

"Yes. But what happened to Captain Mackenzie?"

"He demanded a court of inquiry, of which Commodore Charles Stewart was president. It acquitted him but afterward he was tried by court-martial."

"Tried for what?"

"For murder."

"Was he found guilty?"

"No, not exactly."

"Was he declared innocent?"

"No, not exactly that either. The court reported that the charges against him were not proven and in that way he was acquitted."

"Where is he now?"

"They say he is moving heaven and earth to get a detail, or a ship since this war broke out. He hasn't succeeded yet." *

"Now, what do you think of the whole affair?" asked Denton.

"I think Spencer was a fool," answered Delondes. "There was no doubt but that he had talked mutiny with Wales and Small. Probably he had talked it before and with others. I guess he was a bad lot so far as boys go. He said himself that it was a kind of mania of his to talk about mutiny, and may be that was true. But there wasn't the slightest danger of his getting away with the brig. Therefore Captain Mackenzie had no warrant to hang him."

"What about Cromwell?"

"I don't believe he had anything to do with it, or that he ever knew anything about it. He was an able, experienced seaman, too intelligent to enter upon such a fool expedition. I believe the whole thing was only a foolish, boyish prank on the part of Spencer. Of course, he should have been

* He was afterward, in 1847, attached to the *Mississippi* as executive officer under Commodore Mayo, but he saw no war service, and died in 1848. His son, a most promising young officer, was killed in action against savages in Formosa, in 1867.

punished for it, for no one should even play at mutiny, not even dream about it, especially on a man-of-war. It's too dangerous on a ship-of-war, or any other ship—dangerous for the rest of the men and dangerous for himself. But there was no reason for hanging him the way they did without a hearing, without a defence, without a trial."

"It was monstrous!" cried Denton, hotly.

"Yes, the people of the country generally thought so. Mackenzie was terribly scored about it."

"You don't suppose that he was actuated by any unworthy motives against Spencer and the men, do you?" asked Rogers.

"Certainly not; why should he be? But he made a terrible error in judgment."

"His officers backed him up in it though," remarked Clarke.

"They did, but two of them were not sea officers, the purser and the surgeon, neither of whom was a man of years or experience, and with the exception of the first luff, the rest of them were young fellows but little older than we are. Twenty-one was their average age. Captain Mackenzie was old enough to know better, however."

"Wasn't there something about a Greek paper?"

"Oh, yes, I forgot that. After Spencer was arrested his locker was searched, and they found a paper written in Greek letters in his razor-case. It was a sort of watch-bill for the mutiny, a list of men who were sure, men who were probable, and

so on. The words and names were English, only, instead of using our letters, he used Greek letters. One of the midshipmen knew the Greek alphabet, and translated it. It didn't amount to anything—just a foolish boy's scribbling. In fact, there wasn't any real evidence, except Wales's statement, as to the existence of any mutinous plot. Everything was hearsay, supposition. 'I thought so.' 'I guess so.' 'I judge so.' That was the kind of testimony that was given, and that was the kind of testimony that hung the three."

"You don't think Captain Mackenzie had anything against Spencer, do you?"

"No; as I said, it was just an error in judgment."

"Quite so," said Denton, "but an error no man should be allowed to make without suffering for it."

"Of course not. Most men have to suffer for their errors, I suppose, whatever they are. I guess Captain Mackenzie is finding that out now. I've never ceased to be thankful that I was too young to be called upon to give evidence, or to act as a judge, for I do not know what I might have done then. We were all so much wrought up over the situation that we did not see things clearly, but, thank God, my skirts are clear."

"It was a horrible thing, wasn't it?" said Jackson.

"Awful. Mark my words, fellows, this brig'll come to some harm yet. She's doomed. I don't wonder the men hate to go on watch to-night. I don't believe in ghosts or anything of that sort,

but I'll admit that I feel queerish about my mid-watch myself."

"Yes," said Denton. "We can guess how you feel."

"Of course, if Spencer had kept himself straight all the time it wouldn't have happened."

"Certainly not," said Clarke.

"I tell you what it is, fellows," continued Delondes. "It isn't a good plan even to play at doing wrong, for if a fellow always does right he won't get into any trouble."

"Four bells, gentlemen," called out the master-at-arms; "time to put out the lights."

"Mind, you fellows, you pledged your honor never to tell what I told you about this thing," said Delondes, as they separated and made ready for the night. "I don't know what the captain would say if he knew it."

Although the midshipmen in the steerage did not know it, it happened that at that same instant the captain and his first lieutenant, who had been consulting about the necessary business of the ship, were going over the same subject in the cabin; the officers had been discussing it in the ward-room; and the men on the forecastle were exchanging opinions about it in low whispers, so as not to be heard by the officers on watch.

There is no doubt that Delondes, in his boylike way, was absolutely right in his rough-and-ready conclusion, for the execution of Philip Spencer and the other two men, without warrant of law, or even

form of justice, was as devoid of right as it was devoid of cause, and the whole affair is one of the most serious stains on the records of the United States Navy. Spencer had erred grievously, but had done nothing worthy of death. Small was in the same boat with the midshipman, while Cromwell was absolutely guiltless.

Yet Captain Mackenzie was not without his defenders then, and he has them even to-day. The most that can be said for him is that he was terribly mistaken. Of course, he pleaded the danger to the lives of those under his command, and the possible loss of the ship, which involved her entrance upon a piratical career, as an excuse for his summary methods.

That piratical career idea was preposterous. The *Somers* would have been apprehended within a month, and anybody with any sense or experience must of necessity realize that. As to the danger to himself and to his officers and the probable seizure of the ship, he could have prevented that without much difficulty. The officers were armed, the crew were not. Everybody under him in whom he had not implicit confidence could have been driven below and confined under hatches, while the officers alone, if necessary, could have sailed the brig to St. Thomas, the nearest harbor, distant some five hundred miles, without difficulty. The captain and nine men and boys could easily navigate a brig of that size. It was done then, and is done now every day, in the merchant service. Under the circum-

stances a resolute man would have had little difficulty in retaining control of his ship, without resorting to the severe measures of Captain Mackenzie, until he got her into harbor.

For, be it remembered, there was no evidence aside from the conversations between Spencer and Small, and Spencer and Wales, that there was to be a mutiny, disregarding the foolish paper in Greek letters, which amounted to nothing. Furthermore, if it had progressed far enough to make it dangerous, the most natural course on the part of the mutineers after it had been discovered, would have been to give up all thought of it at once, such things depending for their success on surprise. However, Captain Mackenzie and his officers imagined the theory and fitted every harmless circumstance to approve it. Although he was acquitted by a vote of nine to three by a naval court-martial, it is safe to say that there is no civil court in the world that would not have found Captain Mackenzie guilty of murder.

Spencer said that his mutinous talk was only a joke. I am inclined to believe that he told the truth. But if Spencer was guilty, by lawless talk, Mackenzie was more guilty, by lawless action. Mackenzie was old enough to know better, Spencer was only a boy. The way he and the other two—especially Cromwell, against whom there was not a shadow of real evidence—were done to death, was a disgrace —a shame!

CHAPTER VII

THE LOSS OF THE *SOMERS*

CONTRARY to the general expectation and greatly to everyone's relief, for sailors are the most superstitious people in the world, nothing happened to the *Somers* on the anniversary of the alleged mutiny which had given her such mournful and unpleasant prominence in the naval records. The week following was as monotonous as most of the cruise had been. They sustained the blockade, captured some small and unimportant vessels, and followed out the usual routine of their cruise.

The weather was variable with a tendency to badness. On the evening of December 7th it was blowing hard from the southward and no sail being in sight the brig ran down to the southward of Verde Island and anchored under the lee of the reefs to get shelter and protection from the fierce northwest gale bearing down upon them. At that season of the year and in those waters ships were subjected to sudden and furious storms, called, from the direction whence they usually arose, "Northers." The coast on that account was a most dangerous one.

The *Somers* was ill prepared to face a Norther,

for she had been so long on the blockade without relief, or without receiving supplies, that she was almost in ballast. In other words, her provisions, water, and munitions had run so low that the ship was very high out of the water—"flying light" the sailors called it. This rendered her crank and liable to capsize easily.

Like a prudent and skilful commander, Semmes was careful to protect his brig as much as possible by not leaving the anchorage when the hard gales blew unless it was absolutely necessary to do so to intercept a blockade-runner. There was no safe harbor at that time at Vera Cruz. The port was entirely exposed, and the Gulf in the vicinity was dotted with islands and reefs which added a further element of danger to the situation of the blockading ship.

It blew hard all the night of the 7th, but by the morning of the 8th it had moderated somewhat, although the aspect of the sky was still threatening. As soon as it dawned, Ned Denton, by the direction of the officer of the deck, his friend, Mr. Parker, ran up the foretop-mast cross-trees, glass in hand, and swept the horizon to the northward. At first there was not a sail to be seen, not a vessel in sight except the English, French, and other ships of the foreign squadron, which had dropped down before the hard gale to a safer anchorage near Sacrificios Island, which was scarcely more than a reef. But as he stood on the cross-trees, glass in hand, with

his arm around the fore topgallant-mast peering ahead through the telescope from time to time, he discovered a sail far in the northeast.

The blockade that the *Somers* had maintained had been most effectual. With the exception of the *Creole* no vessel of any importance had succeeded in getting into Vera Cruz, and the *Creole*, as we have seen, had been burned. It would have been madness to take the brig out in the gale of the night before, but the weather had so far moderated that Semmes, after some deliberation, determined to beat up to the approaching ship, which had been reported to the officer of the deck by the midshipman, and by the officer of the deck to the captain. The watch below was summoned immediately, therefore, and the brig got under way.

The wind was blowing hard from the west-northwest, that is, straight through the channel between Verde Island with its encircling reefs, and Pajaros Island, to the westward of it, through which it was necessary for the *Somers* to pass. The brig was very fast and very handy, one of the fleetest and most manageable ships in the navy, and her officers sailed her with consummate skill. Claiborne, the first lieutenant, took the deck and manœuvred the gallant little craft like a yacht. Of course, she had to beat through the channel against the wind, and as the strange sail was coming in toward the anchorage off the castle of San Juan de Ulloa rapidly with a fair wind, there was not much time to lose. It was tack

and run for Verde Island until the prow was almost in the breakers over the outer reefs, then down helm and ready about, and repeat the performance toward Pajaros reef. It was magnificent seamanship as well as daring, and the crew almost felt like cheering with every tack.

Powers and Brice, two of the best seamen on the ship, were at the wheel, and the way they steered the ship excited everybody's admiration. On account of the heavy wind none of the light sails had been set, but the brig worked beautifully under her topsails, courses, jib, and spanker. Finally she cleared the passage between the reefs. As she did so, the wind shifted to the north-northwest, enabling her to lay a course about northeast by north, which, after a few tacks, would bring her across the course of the stranger.

As they got out from among the islands and reefs up into the open portion of the gulf the disability under which they labored became more apparent. The brig bobbed around like a cork, rolling and pitching tremendously in the great seas, as she swept onward. She was as difficult to steer as a wild, unbroken horse to drive. So violent was the motion of the ship that many even of the oldest salts became seasick. Captain Semmes, who had gone forward and scanned the stranger, which was now plainly visible through his glass, announced at last that she was a man-of-war. When he arrived at this conclusion he ordered the private number of the

Somers to be set and soon after received the proper answer with a number which, on consulting the signal-book, he found to be that of the United States sloop-of-war *John Adams*, a vessel which was probably coming to relieve him in the blockade.

With a sigh of relief the captain handed the signal-book to Midshipman Clarke and directed Mr. Claiborne to wear ship and run down to the anchorage of the night before. The helm was put up, the brig swung around before the gale, which had begun to blow up fiercely again, and made the best of her way toward the wished-for anchorage.

It was easy going before the wind and they were rushing down through the passage at a great rate, when another sail was reported far to the northward, standing in for Vera Cruz. Semmes immediately hauled his wind again, and with his starboard tacks aboard once more, essayed to tack his ship through the channel between the islands with view to placing himself between the stranger and the port. The wind having shifted to the northeast since the first time they essayed the passage made it easier for them to get through. In fact, the first tack carried them to the northward of Pajaros reef. The brig was put about and headed for Verde Island, the reef of which Semmes hoped to weather on this tack without being forced to go about again.

The barometer, which had fallen the night before, was still down to 29.80 inches, and the appearance of the heavens to the northward was more threat-

ening than ever. Mr. Parker had relieved Mr. Claiborne, although all hands were on deck at their several stations.

With the port tacks aboard, then the *Somers* raced away for Verde Island. Mr. Parker stood on the weather side of the quarter-deck watching the ship. Captain Semmes had gone to the port, the lee, side, and stepped up on the arm-chest, whence with his glass he was examining the reefs of Verde Island, then bearing about two points on the lee bow. He was endeavoring to decide whether it would be possible to weather the reef on their present tack, and if not, to give timely notice to Mr. Parker to tack the ship.

Denton, who had fetched him the glass, still stood at his elbow. The water boiling and foaming over the reefs was quite perceptible even to the naked eye. It would be touch and go if they weathered it all on that tack, and Semmes had about decided to put the brig about again when Denton, who had been standing to windward, caught him by the sleeve.

"Look, sir!" cried the boy, pointing to a most threatening mass of cloud about to drive down upon them. At the same instant Mr. Parker, from his position on the weather arm-chest, caught sight of it and called out to the captain:

"Look yonder, sir! There's a heavy squall to windward."

"I see it," answered Semmes, running across the

deck to the weather side. "It looks black and dangerous."

There was yet a wide and clear channel astern the brig. Semmes determined instantly to abandon the chase and run for the anchorage. A word gave Mr. Parker his clew.

"All hands shorten sail!" cried the latter. "Man the main-clew-garnets and buntlines and spanker-brails! Hands by the weather braces! Up with the helm! Ease away the sheets! Clew up and brail in! Lively, lads! Round in the braces! Ease off to leeward!"

The men, appreciating their danger, for the squall, which was about to burst upon them, had risen with appalling suddenness and with practically no warning whatever, worked with a will. The heavy main course was hauled up to the yard at once, but something fouled the spanker-brails and the sail was only half brailed in when the furious squall struck them. Strange to say, there were none of the usual evidences of severity about it, save the blackness, for it was not accompanied by the sudden foaming of the water or by any of the other indications which presaged the advent of these severe and sudden blasts. It was not until it broke that they realized how tremendous it was. It caught the brig, already wearing, fairly amidships and hurled her over to leeward so far that she could not be steered.

"Hard up, hard up!" roared Semmes, hoping she might pay off, taking charge of the deck himself

while the men began to scramble for the weather side of the brig.

"She won't answer the helm, sir," cried the taciturn Powers, finding voice in this emergency.

Indeed, the pressure of water on the half-submerged lee bow was already tending to throw her up into the wind. Semmes, with the instinct of a true sailor, changed his plan on the instant.

"Put the helm down!" he shouted. "Flow the head sheets forward! Avast with those brails! Haul over that spanker-sheet!"

He hoped by this means to luff and shake the wind out of the sails, although if he succeeded in doing that there was always the extreme danger that he would be taken aback and swamped.

However, that was a risk that he must venture, for they were doomed as they were, unless something could be done instantly.

"Ay, ay, sir," shouted Powers, revolving the wheel rapidly to reverse the previous direction of the helm, in which work he was assisted by several seamen of the afterguard.

It was of no use. The squall increased in violence and the brig at last went fairly over on her beam-ends, heaving her port bilges out of the water, upon which the waves, following in the wake of the wind, began to beat with tremendous force. She lay on her side, masts and spars in the water, which was pouring into the ship through every hatch and scuttle. She began to settle with astonishing rapidity.

Went Fairly over on Her Beam Ends

The moments were fraught with the direst peril, yet such was the discipline and manhood of the crew that there was no panic.

"Cut away the masts!" shouted the captain.

Boarding-axes were instantly applied to the weather shrouds in the hope that by cutting them the masts would carry away and the brig would be righted. But she had made too much water for that expedient to be of service. The brig was lost beyond peradventure. The only thing to be thought of was to save the men. A few of them had already been washed away when she went on her beam-ends, but most of them had scrambled up to the exposed side, where they clung to the rail as best they could.

The starboard boats and the boats lashed amidships were already under water and there was nothing left but one small boat hanging at the port davits, the same boat, by the way, that had been used in the burning of the *Creole*. By the exercise of bold and daring seamanship, under the personal direction of Captain Semmes, they succeeded in launching this boat inboard, that is, on the lee side of the brig, where it was in a measure protected from the violence of the waves.

"I want the best boat-officer, Mr. Claiborne!" shouted Semmes.

"That will be Denton."

"Mr. Denton, take the boat!"

"Oh, Captain Semmes, let me stand by the ship!" urged the youngster.

"Take the boat, sir! There is a higher duty than standing by the ship, and that is obedience!"

"Ay, ay, sir," said Denton, scrambling into the stern-sheets and seizing the tiller.

"Those of you who cannot swim," roared the captain, "aft to the boat! Lively!"

There was no movement among that splendid crew. It was evident that those in the boat might be the only ones saved, and they all hung back, none desirous of safety at the expense of another.

"For God's sake, men!" shouted Semmes, "who is it that can't swim?"

At this there was a chorus from the men who could swim, who pointed out those who could not, in spite of their denials.

"Into the boat with you!" called out Semmes, again addressing each one by name.

Five veteran seamen took the oars, among whom was old Ben Griffin, who, although he had been many years on the sea, had never learned to swim a stroke. Vainly protesting, he was ordered to a place at the thwarts. Among the men in the boat, into which they crowded fourteen passengers—a heavy load for a boat of that size even under favorable circumstances, and a frightful one in such a sea—was a man named Seymour, the ship's cook. He was a huge creature, and when Mr. Parker saw him, it came into his mind that two men of less size could be accommodated in his place, so he called him out of the boat. Although the man

could not swim, he complied with the order without a moment's hesitation, but some of his mates informing the officer that he could not swim, he was ordered back to his place. The only officers to go into the boat, besides the midshipman in command, were the purser and surgeon.

Mr. Hynson, with his arm still in the bandages, was clinging to the railing of the brig just above the boat. Powers and Nutter were among the men who were in the boat. As soon as Nutter perceived the wounded midshipman, he scrambled out of the boat and offered his place to Hynson.

"I won't take your place," answered Hynson.

"Mine, then," said old Powers, also getting out of the boat.

"Nor yours," said Hynson.

"Then I'll stay with the ship," said Nutter.

"And I," replied Powers.

Two other men were put in the place of these two. The morale of that crew was magnificent, and the feeling between officers and crew was of the very highest, for several of the men in the boat begged the officers by name to take their places.

All this happened in a few minutes, during which the brig was visibly settling in the water. At last, fearing that she would sink before the boat would get far enough away to avoid being engulfed in the vortex, Semmes directed Denton to shove off, pull for the reef, and land his men. With a breaking heart the midshipman gave the order, the oars were

shipped and the little boat pulled away from the lee of the brig. Although the men left on her seemed doomed to certain death, they gave three cheers as their only boat left the side.

The boat had twenty men all told in her. She was loaded down until the gunwales were only a few inches above the water. Bidding the men sit still and make as little motion as possible—indeed, they were packed too closely for much movement—and directing those who could do so to bale out with their hands the water that drove into it, Denton headed the boat for the shore, the men at the oars pulling madly.

"Look at the brig, sir," said old Griffin to the midshipman steering, as he tugged away at his oar.

"I daren't look back," answered Denton, fearing to relax his effort to keep the boat afloat even for a second lest she should be capsized. "What's happening?"

"She's goin' down! God! She's gone, sir! They'll be drownded in the water!"

"Pull, men, for God's sake!" cried Ned, "so that we may land these and go back for the rest!"

Indeed, the boat had scarcely got twenty paces from the side of the sinking ship when Semmes perceived that she was sinking. Ten minutes only had elapsed since the squall struck them.

"She's going down!" he cried, as the men clustered on the wreck. "Let every man save himself who can! I order you to leave the ship!"

As he spoke there was a simultaneous plunge into the sea of all the men and officers left on the ship, each man striving to get hold of some piece of wreckage floating about which would assist him in the awful struggle that must ensue, and by the aid of which he could swim far enough away from the sinking hulk not to be drawn under by the tremendous suction when she went down.

Some succeeded in reaching a grating, some managed to grasp an oar, some clung to a hen-coop, a boat-mast supported others; many, alas, found nothing and were dragged beneath the water and drowned when the ship made its last plunge. Sailing-master Clemson and five men got hold of a studding-sail-boom. Their united weight, as they seized it in succession, at last bore it down in the water, and it was instantly seen that it would not support them all.

"I can swim, lads," said Clemson, "and some of you can't."

Whereupon he released the boom, which was now sufficiently buoyant to support them, and struck out for himself. He found nothing else to which he could cling, and after swimming as long as he could he was overwhelmed by the seas and drowned. The five men were saved.

Hynson, who had refused to go into the boat, succeeded in clutching the top of an arm-chest, but was unable to retain his hold upon it on account of his burned arms, and was washed away from it and

drowned. Nutter, making a vain effort to save him, met the same fate. Powers caught a grating and was saved.

Captain Semmes and Mr. Parker were the last to leap from the sinking hulk. They managed to get hold of an arm-chest grating, both being strong swimmers, but it was not sufficiently buoyant to support them both, and Parker heroically released his hold upon it, intending to give it to his commander, who was equally willing to give it up to his subordinate. Fortunately, however, Parker caught an upper half-port, and the two officers lashed it to the grating, which thus afforded support for both of them.

Meanwhile, the *John Adams*, and the foreign ships in the harbor lying off Sacrificios which had seen the catastrophe, immediately launched boats which picked up part of the crew. Denton, by daring and skill and good luck, had succeeded in landing his passengers on Verde Island. Immediately he put out again in the face of frightful peril, the little boat being tossed like a leaf in the waves, and succeeded in picking up the captain, Mr. Parker, and a few seamen. Landing these, although the captain was of the opinion that it was scarcely safe to venture again, the indefatigable youngster, with his brave crew, put out to sea once more.

This time it was too late ; although the men rowed around the spot where the *Somers* had gone down for some time, they did not see another soul above

the water. The squall had been succeeded by another furious Norther, of which it had only been the forerunner, and although Denton kept his boat out until he was in imminent danger of sinking, he was finally forced to turn and run for the shore.

In this terrible catastrophe the *Somers* lost more than forty officers and men, over half her crew. Captain Semmes was honorably acquitted for the loss of his ship, and Commodore Matthew C. Perry, on the arrival of the squadron from the Tampico expedition, offered to Ned Denton a position on his staff as aid.

Commodore Perry and Commodore Denton, Ned's father, who was then on the Pacific coast, were old friends, and the boy was delighted at the opportunity of getting a berth on the commodore's ship, the famous steam-frigate *Mississippi*, a marvel of marine architecture in those days, and a ship greatly renowned in the old navy until she was sunk under the Confederate guns at Port Hudson in 1862.

Ned was doubly glad to go to this ship, to which his old commander, Captain Semmes, was also attached on the commodore's staff, for his dearest friend, Joe Bailey, was stationed on her as a second lieutenant in her quota of marines.

CHAPTER VIII

A LANDING PARTY IN SEARCH OF MILK

Six months after the loss of the *Somers*, the *Mississippi*, still flying Commodore Perry's broad pennant, was steaming down the coast south of Vera Cruz to visit the ships in the various blockading stations. Denton was still on the commodore's staff. There had been an immense amount of work in connection with the administration of the Gulf fleet, which was the largest and most formidable that had, up to that time, been gathered under a single officer's flag. And when to the numbers of warships were added the transports for Scott's army, which were all under the charge of the navy, the command became an enormous one.

Commodore Matthew C. Perry, the famous Perry who afterward opened Japan to the commerce of the nations of the world, was one of the most gallant and most accomplished officers ever known in the American Navy, and he should have been appointed a rear-admiral. Although the navy, from the circumstances of the case, was unable to perform very brilliant service, especially on the Gulf coast, or to take part in any of the great battles, for Mexico

had no navy to oppose to our ships, yet it did what it had to do with the same thoroughness and skill which the navy had always exhibited, and which it was to continue to exhibit in the various wars of the United States.

Much had happened in the long interval. First of all, the original plan, by which Mexico was to be invaded from the north by the army under General Taylor, had been modified. General Scott's plan of reaching Mexico by the capture of Vera Cruz and a march across the mountains had been adopted. Commodore Connor, who was the first flag-officer in the Gulf, had been succeeded by Commodore Perry. Scott had been provided with a highly efficient army of twelve thousand men, regulars and volunteers; a landing had been effected at Vera Cruz without the loss of a man, owing to the careful planning of Commodore Connor, whose dispositions were brilliantly carried out by the seamen. The city of Vera Cruz, together with Fort San Juan de Ulloa, had been bombarded by the army and navy, and although both arms of the service had done brilliantly, yet the greatest factor in contributing to the downfall of the city had been the naval battery.

Scott's army was without proper siege train, at least he had not a sufficient number of heavy guns, and the deficiency had been supplemented by a battery of long thirty-twos and 68-pound Paixhan shell guns which had been landed from the ships and

which had been fought by the officers and men thereof. Scott, in despair over the non-arrival of the major portion of his siege train, had asked Commodore Perry for the loan of some of the heavy guns of the ships.

"You shall have them," replied the gallant commodore, "but my men must fight them."

Where the guns went, there went the men also, in spite of the objections of the army artillerists, who wished to fight the naval guns themselves. So the famous naval battery had been erected. It was made out of sand-bags. The guns had been transported from the ships in boats by their own men, hauled across the sandy beach on trucks, mounted on their ship carriages, and fought just as they would have been in the batteries of the frigates.

This battery had done fearful execution, and it is no doubt that the surrender of Vera Cruz was due more to its devastating broadsides than to any other single cause. Several of the naval officers and men had been wounded, one midshipman had been killed, others had performed acts of gallantry which had covered the navy with glory and had won the express commendation of that gallant old warrior, General Scott.

During the operations Commander Tatnall, the man who had said that "Blood was thicker than water," when he went on an American ship to the assistance of the English at the bombardment of

the Peiho forts in China some years after, had shown extraordinary courage in bombarding the castle of San Juan de Ulloa and the city as well. Assisted by Commander Sands, another gallant spirit, with two small steamers and some schooner-rigged gunboats, he had ventured close to the walls, and not seeing a recall signal in the furious cannonade, he had clung to his position until recalled by a boat from the flag-ship in which Denton had gallantly ventured into a sea of fire to transmit the commodore's order to the dauntless captain.

The castle had capitulated at the same time with the city, and Scott's army had started on that most wonderful march by which they were to penetrate and master a populous and wealthy country defended by large armies of brave and patriotic soldiers, fighting behind natural defences almost as great as those that opposed Hannibal and Napoleon in their progress over the Alps. Scott had inaugurated one of the most brilliant campaigns and was about to perform one of the most magnificent feats of arms that any American commander ever attempted or achieved.

The navy had already made several successful expeditions along the coast, and nearly every port of importance was now in the hands of American naval officers, who administered the affairs, collected the customs, and carried on the government with as much ease as if they had been born to the performance of these duties.

Every precaution which medical science in those days had at command was taken to keep up the health of the fleet. Still, there were a number of sick on the *Mississippi* and the other ships who could not be sent north, and the chief surgeon of the flag-ship happened to express to Commodore Perry a desire for some fresh milk for one or two of the men and officers whose continued illness was most critical. Nothing of pressing importance requiring the flag-ship to hasten on her tour of inspection, Commodore Perry ran toward the shore as close as he dared on account of the depth of the water, and called for volunteers for a boat-party to go off and try to procure some fresh milk.

There were little settlements all along the shore, and it was opposite one of them that the *Mississippi* came to anchor. Scott's army had fought the famous battle of Cerro Gordo in their progress toward the interior, and it was believed on the ship that there were no armed forces of Mexico within twenty miles of the coast, which was constantly patrolled by American war-vessels. Nevertheless, to take due precaution, Commodore Perry directed his flag-captain to see that a heavily armed boat's crew were sent under a competent officer.

The choice for the command of the expedition fell upon Ned Denton, to his great delight. He solicited that Griffin and Powers should go with the boat's crew. The first cutter of the *Mississippi*, a large, twelve-oared boat, was selected and manned

by a volunteer crew, each one armed with cutlass and pistol. Powers took the stroke oar and old Ben sat down in the coxswain's box to steer the cutter.

Most of the marines of the ship and fleet had been incorporated in a marine battalion under Colonel Watson and Major Twiggs, which formed the nucleus of a brigade of Quitman's division of Scott's army, and were now doing valiant service on the march from Vera Cruz. With this division had gone Denton's best friend, Joe Bailey. But from the few marines who were left on the ship Captain Adams detailed four to accompany the boat-party in case their services should be needed.

There was little risk in the expedition, although no one could tell just what would happen. Yet it would not have been undertaken had not the doctor declared that unless he could give the men who were so desperately ill a change of diet—some fresh milk, that is—he could not answer for their lives.

Receiving many cautions from the commodore and captain, Denton at last shoved off. The weather was mild and the sea fairly smooth. The heavy cutter, rowed by the powerful arms of the twelve brawny sailors with their sweeping man-o'-war stroke, rapidly approached the shore.

"By the way," said Denton, breaking the silence which had been maintained since they had left the ship, "do any of you men forward know how to milk a cow?"

The question was received with a bewildered stare by the boat's crew.

"Do any of your marines know anything about milking a cow, corporal?" continued the midshipman, addressing the leader of the little squad. "Can any of your company milk a cow?"

After a brief inquiry, the corporal returned a negative answer.

"Well, is it possible," said Denton, in surprise, "that none of you blue-jackets in this boat knows how to milk a cow? Don't you, Chaffen?"

"No, sir."

"Don't any of you?"

"No, sir," at last came in a chorus from the seamen.

Powers only shook his head.

"Gracious goodness, don't you know anything about it, Griffin?"

"Wot, sir, me, sir? No, sir. As fer as I'm consarned I've hardly ever seed one of them cow critters, 'ceptin' it's been in the beef cask, w'ich you can't tell 'em then from horse, an' I guess the rest of this crew's in the same fix. That's as much sense as a sailorman ever shows," continued that seaman, not a whit abashed, "they all wants to buy farms w'en they gives up the sea, and they don't know, none of them, the difference between the quarter-deck an fo'c's'l of a cow. Now——"

"What'll we do?" said Denton, looking puzzled; "we should have passed the word on the ship for

someone who could milk a cow to come along with us."

"We'd ought to have done that," continued old Ben, "but I doubt ef you could hev got ennyone. Ye see, sir, milkin' ain't part of a seaman's dooty no more'n horseback-ridin'. W'en we wus a-fightin' that battery at Vera Cruz, old Brice there, he got on a kind of a mule critter, an' he wus a ridin' round the camp w'en sum of them calavary officers, them fellers with iron pots over their top-pieces, like boardin' caps, they sez to him :

"'Man,' sez they, 'you are a-settin' too fer back on that critter.'

"Well, old Brice, he sez, sez he :

"'This is the fust time I ever commanded afore, an' it's a blame shame ef I can't set on the quarter-deck onct in my life.'

"So he hunches himself back further than ever jest to show 'em that a prime seaman don't hev to take no orders from no soger man."

"Did you ever hear about Mr. Young, Ben?" said Denton, laughing over this description.

"No, sir, leastways, I've heard tell of a lot of tricks of his'n, but I reckon not this one."

"Well, he was sent by the commodore to carry a message to a troop of horse and some other forces that were making a joint attack with the navy on the bridge, and as it was some distance from the shore where he landed to the troops, he borrowed a horse. Just as he got up with the cavalry they

charged the bridge. As soon as the old horse he was riding heard the sound of the trumpet he ran away. Mr. Young, not being a good horseman, couldn't control that horse, and he ran so fast that he got in front of all the dragoons, and so they charged across this bridge, Mr. Young yelling like mad. He said afterward that he was almost scared to death, but Colonel Harney, who had command of the dragoons, sent a very handsome letter to Commodore Perry commending the gallantry of the young naval officer who, happening to be on hand when the charge was made, actually galloped first across the bridge under a heavy fire!"

"Yes, sir, ye never kin tell wot them horses'll do," said Griffin, "w'en I mount one of 'em I wants to kerry an anchor along with me in case they should take a notion to get under way without orders."

"Well, this is all very well," said Denton, "but what are we going to do about milking the cow?"

"Well, sir, the fust thing we've got to do, I reckon, is to git hold of the cow. Then we kin git a Mexican to milk it or her, or him—blame it, wot is the critter?"

"Cows are feminine," laughed Denton, "you should say 'her,' but anyway, we'll soon be ashore, and perhaps your plan's the best."

The place for which the boat had been headed was a sandy beach in front of a little hamlet, or what had been a hamlet, for the village appeared

to be deserted, and there were no signs of life about. Leaving the two seamen to guard the boat the rest of the party disembarked.

Denton and old Ben Griffin, who constituted himself his aid, went in advance with the marines, who were deployed so as to cover a considerable territory; the rest of the sailors in charge of Powers followed at some distance. Unknown to Denton, several small tackles and some rope had been clapped in the boat, and these by Griffin's orders were brought along by the men, who also carried buckets and cans for the milk.

The village was plainly deserted. They found no one as they advanced, until finally in a house farthest from the sea, they came upon a bedridden old woman and a little girl, who had remained to wait upon her. They were both dreadfully scared at the sight of the marines and sailors. Denton, however, who had become quite familiar with the Spanish tongue—in fact, all the officers studied the language assiduously—calmed them by assuring them he meant no harm. They had come ashore simply to get a cow from which to get some fresh milk for some sick shipmates. He asked them if they had any milk there. They had not, it appeared, but they knew where some cows were if the Americanos would go and get them. Denton explained their further predicament about milking to the young girl, a child of ten or twelve, who thereupon volunteered to go with them and milk a cow for them.

CHAPTER IX

MILKING COWS AND FIGHTING BATTLES

INQUIRING carefully if there were any troops about and receiving a negative reply, the landing party, led by the little girl, made their way into the country through a little grove of palms to a meadow in which three or four small Mexican cows were quietly grazing. The meadow was not enclosed and they soon found that it was a matter of some difficulty to catch a cow. The seamanlike way seemed to be to treat each animal as a ship and to endeavor to carry her by boarding. The sudden appearance of so many strange-looking men frightened the cows, and the blue-jackets in high glee amused themselves for half an hour by a fruitless chase after one distracted animal until they cornered her.

The girl at this juncture informed them very emphatically that the cow would not give any milk now after her great exertions. Indeed, she had volunteered the information before, during the chase, but they had all been too excited to pay much attention to her.

"If the señor will come with me," she said, "and keep the rest of these caballeros back, I can easily catch a cow for him."

"You better not do it, Mr. Denton," said Griffin, when the offer had been translated to him; "ye can't trust them Mexican gals, I'm sure."

"Well, we've got to get some milk, Ben, that's all there is about it, and I don't see any other way. Hand me that line, yonder, and I'll see what we can do."

The little girl, permission being given, went quietly to another part of the field, followed by the midshipman, and without much difficulty Denton succeeded in fastening the rope around the horns of a cow, and leading her back to the men under the trees bordering the field. None of the seamen or marines were at all familiar with the habits of domestic animals, but they conceived that the first thing to do was to bind the creature, which they had captured, hard and fast. Under Griffin's supervision, and in spite of the fruitless protests of the girl, they proceeded to clap a block and tackle on each one of the cow's legs, the other end of which they fastened to convenient trees, putting a couple of men at each fall with instructions to haul taut if the cow grew restless. Having got her fastened to his taste, old Ben reported to the midshipman, who signed to the volunteer milkmaid to go ahead.

The child, who had watched the grotesque performances of the men with horror and surprise, utterly refused to approach the cow after she had been so tethered. Denton's most persuasive efforts could not move her. The cow had made no objec-

tion whatever to being secured in this ship-shape way during the process. She stood quietly chewing her cud, examining with interest the American seamen for some time. She was a small cow, not particularly aggressive in manner or appearance.

Finally, despairing of getting the girl to do the milking, Denton called for volunteers. Nobody offering, he flatly ordered Ben Griffin to try his hand.

"Wot, me, sir! Me milk a cow, sir!"

"Yes, you," said Denton. "You're the oldest man here and have had more experience than the rest of us, and you ought to know something about this affair. Besides, a sailorman, as you have often said, ought to be able to do anything."

"Well, if it comes to that," said Ben, boastfully, "I guess I kin milk her as well as anyone in this boat's crew. Now you fellers on the tackles stand by fer orders."

"That's right," said Denton, "keep your eyes open and stand by."

The men thus admonished, spat on their hands and took a fresh hold of the falls of the tackles, while old Ben approached the observant cow, bucket in hand. He stepped forward rather gingerly, be it said, in spite of his courageous words, endeavoring to conceal his dismay by an affectation of boldness and familiarity.

"She don't seem exactly square by the lifts and braces," he said, stepping nearer and squinting at the

creature critically, as if she were a mast covered with yards; "I think if you'll jest give the critter a little pull on that port for'ard leg tackle and take up a slack of the starboard after leg tackle, she'll be a little better off."

The port forward leg of the animal was suddenly pulled a couple of inches, and the starboard after leg was subjected to the strain of the taut tackle. The cow lifted her head in some surprise, and Ben chose that unlucky moment to try to milk her. As soon as she felt the touch of the unfamiliar and unskilled hand she went into action. One switch of her tail took old Ben over the mouth—his sensitive spot—and so excited him that he tumbled backward on the grass, yelling madly for the men to set taut on the tackles.

The men on the port side could not see what was happening, and they hauled away lustily. Those on the starboard side were so convulsed with laughter that they hardly knew what they were doing. As the cow felt the pressure of the tackle relax on one side and strain on the other, she began to plunge and kick madly. In half a minute she was free, and away she went careering over that field with blocks and tackles tangled in wild confusion about her feet.

The effort had been a painful failure.

"I tell you wot it is, Mr. Denton," exploded old Ben, rising to his feet amid the roars of his shipmates, "this yere experience has forever cured me of that farm fever. I ain't never goin' to talk of

buyin' a farm agin. I sticks to the ship. The only animal I gits familiar with hereafter is the ship's jackass, w'ich it ain't no animal arter all."

"We seem to be as far away from that milk as ever," said Denton, as soon as his laughter permitted him to speak. As he did so his eye fell upon the small girl, who, with a Mexican's absence of humor, stood staring at the man with open mouth and eyes full of disgust. "Perhaps we should have let her get the milk herself," he said.

His hand went down into his pocket. Fortunately he had just been paid. That pocket would have been empty if it had been toward the last of the month. He hauled out a gold piece, held it up before the girl, handed her a bucket with the remark that she should have the half-eagle if she filled the bucket with milk. It was a high price for a bucket of milk, but inasmuch as the whole boat's crew appeared unequal to the task of milking one cow, he felt that it was not an extravagant outlay. The girl laughed—the money seemed to produce that effect—ran off to one of the cows on the edge of the field, and in a surprisingly short time reappeared with a bucket filled to the brim.

"That'll have to do, I guess," said Denton. "We can get no more. Now let's go back to the boat."

"How about them tackles on that 'ere cow, sir?" asked Griffin, pointing to the cow which had been the object of their experiments.

"Do you want to go and get them?"

"Lord, no!" gasped the sailor.

"Well," laughed Denton, "I guess we'll have to report them as expended in operations against the enemy."

"Werry good, sir," returned the old sailor, smiling; and the little party having bought the milk at so high a price and with such an experience started back to the boat.

The girl had taken the money and disappeared. As they broke through the trees on the land side of the hamlet they saw a party of Mexican dragoons, probably fifty in number, galloping down the beach toward them. Each one carried a long spear or lance with a little pennant fluttering from it. They managed their horses magnificently and came on with a gallant rush.

"Draw your pistols and swords, men!" cried Denton, instantly, "but don't fire till I give the word."

Suiting his action to the word, he hauled out his own revolver, cocked it, and bared his sword.

"Marines to the front! Form line abreast!" he shouted, "and give it to them!"

With great steadiness the four marines stepped out, understanding fully the nautical instructions given them, presented their muskets and poured a volley into the approaching horsemen. Two saddles were emptied and two other men were seen to reel, but the impetus of the charge was so great that the rest came on. Without orders the marines clapped

on their bayonets and then frantically strove to reload their muskets.

"Griffin, lead the seamen with the milk to the boat!" said Denton, perceiving the seriousness of the situation and that the horsemen would be upon them in a few moments, "and if we don't come up, tell the commodore that we stayed here to cover the retreat of the party."

Denton ran rapidly forward to the ruins of a little house standing directly in line between the retreating seamen and the approaching horsemen. There he ordered the marines to take cover and the men with the steadiness of veteran soldiers ran toward it. The sailors ordered to the boat hesitated, not liking to desert their officer. Casting an anxious look backward, Denton saw that his orders had not been obeyed. He shouted out again:

"Take that milk back to the boat and make the best of your way to the frigate. We'll hold these people as long as we can. We don't want you here."

In the face of this peremptory order the men began to move toward the shore, at first slowly and reluctantly, but they soon quickened into a run. Meanwhile Denton joined the advancing marines, but before they reached the house the lancers were on them. The midshipman's pistol cracked twice; the marines, who had reloaded their pieces, discharged them, then, with beating hearts and bayonets presented, awaited the onrushing horsemen.

The lancers rode them down in an instant. The

whole party was overborne by the tremendous onset. They were all knocked to the ground and three of the marines were badly wounded. The officer in command of the lancers directed his men instantly to despatch the poor wounded men with their lances. The fourth was taken prisoner, as was Denton. He glanced toward the shore just as he fell and observed that the boat was pulling frantically toward the ship.

At the same instant the reports of two pistols were heard from the corner of one of the houses of the village and two of the lancers fell. In great astonishment Denton stared in the direction whence the shots had come and then two men burst from the cover of the woods and came rushing toward them through the grass, yelling like mad men as they ran. At the instant the shots came, the soldier guarding the remaining marine had shortened his lance and driven it through him, killing him immediately. The man nearest the midshipman was about to do the same, but the Mexican officer, seeing that the attack had been made by but two men and knowing they had no fear of further attack, restrained him, especially since his prisoner was an officer. The two men who had made the charge were at once surrounded and overborne, and only Denton's vehement protests kept them from being pinned to the earth by the lances of the dragoons as the poor marines had been.

"What foolish trick is this?" asked Denton of Griffin and Powers, who had made the absurd charge.

"Arter we took the milk to the boat we cut fer here, not wantin' to leave an officer in distress," said the older man, not in the least abashed. "We saw you wus bein' cut down, an' we fired an' boarded 'em in a seamanlike way with a cheer."

"Well, you didn't do much good," said Denton, wrathfully; "just got yourselves captured. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

"Yes, sir, we are, sir," said the old man, with a twinkle in his eye, "but we're in fer it now, an' you have two able seamen under your command to help you on this cruise wotever they means to do with us.'

"Señor," said the captain of the dragoons, "you have surrendered, of course?"

"I should say so," answered Denton.

"Well, then, we shall have to move on. Look yonder."

Following his pointed arm, they perceived the launch and two of the cutters of the *Mississippi* all filled with heavily armed men pulling away from the ship in the hope that they might arrive in time to engage the party of lancers which had captured the men.

"We shall have to move on at once," repeated the captain.

"At your orders, sir."

"Mount them on those horses," said the officer, pointing to the three horses whose riders had been killed by the Americans. "Take their arms and let a man on each side take the bridle. Forward!"

They were within easy range of the broadside guns of the *Mississippi*, which, however, refrained from firing for fear of hitting her own men, and the soldiers galloped along the sandy beach toward the first clump of trees, round which they turned and were soon beyond all pursuit from the ship.

"Ben," said Denton as soon as he could, "how about that milk? Did you spill it?"

"Nary a drop, sir," answered the boatswain's mate. "I stowed it away safe in the starn sheets myself."

"Well, I'm glad we got it," said Denton. "We had a hard enough time about it, didn't we, though?"

"Silence!" cried the Mexican leader as they galloped on.

CHAPTER X

AN ADVENTURE IN THE MOUNTAINS

The horsemen with the three unfortunate prisoners galloped rapidly through the trees after they left the shore until they struck a broad highway leading westward toward the mountains. Contrary to the usual practice of the Mexican cavalry, who were accustomed to small and inefficient horses, this body of men was well mounted. They had acquired their horses by the simple process of taking them wherever they found them without leave or permission from anyone.

Since the destructive and overwhelming defeat of Santa Anna at Cerro Gordo, and the establishment of Scott's forces at Jalapa and Perote, the Mexican army had become thoroughly disorganized, and this particular body of men was only one among many bands of guerrillas which sought excuse in the prevalent disorder to plunder indiscriminately friends and foes as it could. More daring than the ordinary irregular leader, the captain of this particular band had led them over the mountains by one of the southern roads to see what could be picked up on the seacoast.

A bold and skilful ravager, thoroughly acquainted with the locality, his success had been abundant. He had cut off American stragglers and harried the country without mercy. Wherever he went he left a trail of blood. Even then an expedition under Colonel Peyton, commanding several squadrons of cavalry, which had recently arrived at Vera Cruz, was scouring the country for him. Don Ramon Garcia, the captain of this guerrilla band, had concluded that he had done all the damage possible with his small force, and that a prudent regard for safety enjoined that he would better return at once beyond the mountains to the valley of Mexico, which had not yet been invaded by Scott's army.

He had not taken any prisoners heretofore, murdering all who fell into his power, as he had the poor marines of the *Mississippi* on the beach, but as he intended, on his return to the valley, to rejoin the army which Santa Anna, with furious energy, was endeavoring to reorganize, he thought it would be just as well for him to bring back some prisoners, especially if he could include an officer among them. These, with the treasure he had looted from friends and foes alike, a small portion of which he was prepared to give up to the constituted authorities, would prevent his unauthorized movements from being too rigidly scrutinized, for Don Ramon Garcia was a captain in the Mexican light cavalry, and had no business to be conducting an expedition of this

character on his own account and for his own private gain.

He realized, too, that the *Mississippi* would at once report the loss of the midshipman and the sailors, and he surmised that Colonel Peyton would immediately institute a further and more rigid search for his band. Therefore he spared neither horses nor men, and although the morning was already far spent when the surrender had taken place and the men had been in the saddle since daybreak, he did not even stop at noon for a siesta or a meal, but galloped steadily on toward the mountains. It was evening when the party halted in a romantic little glen in the foothills below the mighty volcano of Orizaba, around which the road led. It climbed the mountain-range a few miles farther until it reached the pass at an elevation of some ten thousand feet, whence it plunged rapidly down into the valley.

The road was little used, not being one of the main thoroughfares; besides, it was too dangerous and difficult to be attempted at night. For another thing, everyone in the party was completely worn out. The horses were exhausted and the men tired out by their hard riding.

The condition of the young midshipman and the two old sailors was indeed pitiable. Being entirely unaccustomed to riding they suffered greatly in this mad dash for the hills, and when the detachment finally halted they were so stiff and sore and strained

that they could hardly keep their feet when they got out of their saddles. For once even the persistent inclination of Ben Griffin to talk was in a measure quelled. All he said as he fell on the grass under the trees when he was permitted to, as he said, "disembark" from the hateful animal, was:

"To think, Master Ned, that any man gits on one of them critters fer pleasure! I've had an experience with a cow this mornin' an' a horse the rest of the day that'll last me my time, an' I sez, gimme a ship, if I ever gits back to one, all the time! No more dreamin' of farms fer me. I've had enough an' I knows it. 'Don't give up the ship,' said Cap'n Lawrence on the *Chesapeake*, as you'll recall sir, w'en he wus dyin', an' I sez the same, w'ich I won't never leave it agin. I feel as if I wus split clear up to my chin. D'ye think I'm all right, Powers?" anxiously asked the old sailor, turning to his equally distressed shipmate.

Powers the silent only grunted. He had spirit for nothing further.

"By George, Ben," said Ned Denton, ruefully, "you're right. Yet just take a look at those men. They seem as chipper as if they had been sitting on the boat-thwarts all day doing nothing but pulling an oar, or some light easy work of that sort. I'd rather take watch and watch at the pumps than another day of this."

Captain Garcia, who had been supervising the making of a camp, now came strolling over to where

the three Americans lay on the ground groaning in anguish.

"What's the matter?" he asked not unkindly. "Are you wounded? Ill?"

"Nothing," answered Denton; indeed, he was the only one who understood and spoke the Spanish tongue; "but we're not used to riding, being sailors, you know, and this has been a rather hard experience. May I ask who and what you are?"

"I am Don Ramon Garcia, captain in the First Light Cavalry Regiment of the Mexican army, on a —well, on a foraging expedition."

"What are you going to do with us?"

"Is it usual in the American service, señor, for prisoners to catechize their captors?"

"Well, no, not exactly, I suppose, but I should like to know if you intend to kill us as you did those poor marines," returned the youngster, glowering at the recollection of the cruel slaughter of his wounded men.

"Señor," explained the Mexican, lightly, "that was done in the heat of action, and I'm sure you'll admit that your men put up a stout fight. I congratulate you upon them. But I see no reason why I should not tell you that we propose to hold you as prisoner, take you across the mountains, and deliver you up to General Santa Anna."

"And my men?"

"It doesn't so much matter about them, does it?" answered Garcia, shrugging his shoulders.

"But you are an officer, albeit a young one, and——"

"I won't go a step without those men!" exclaimed Denton, hotly. "Besides, although they are only seamen, they are two of the most important men on the flagship, and Commodore Perry will give a good deal to have them back."

"Oh, very good," answered the Mexican, who seemed to be in a high good-humor, as well he might, considering the plunder in the way of coin and jewels with which he and his nefarious troopers were laden. "Very well, if you insist, they shall go with you. Of course, you understand that there is no other way of progression except in the saddle?"

"I suppose so. Well, we'll try to make the best of it in this case."

"You will give me your word of honor that you will not attempt to escape while in my charge, señor? Your word will answer for the others as well."

"I will not!" answered Denton, stoutly.

"No?" continued the man.

"Of course not," went on the boy, frankly. "I warn you we intend to cut and run the first good chance we get."

The captain laughed pleasantly at the blunt manner of the American boy, which seemed to amuse him. He could be as courteous as cruel on occasion.

"Oh, very well, as you please, but I'll see that

you get no chance," he said, coolly puffing away at his cigarette as he had done all through the interview. "Meanwhile it will doubtless please you to know that supper will soon be ready. After that I'll have to secure you for the night. It won't be pleasant; you'd better give your parole."

"You may do as you like," responded the boy, recklessly, "but I won't give any parole not to attempt to escape, for I mean to do it."

While this conversation had been going on the troopers had unsaddled their horses, fires had been kindled, and a substantial meal was in preparation. The secluded little glen was filled with trees, and the soft grass beneath them made a delightful spot for a camp. A brook babbling through it provided plenty of water. As the captain moved away old Ben appealed to the midshipman.

"Beg pardon, Master Ned," relaxing into the old familiar address, "but wot wus he a-sayin' to you?"

"He said he was going to hold us prisoners, take us across the mountains, and deliver us up to Santa Anna."

"How's he to git us over them?"

"We'll have to ride."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned the old man; "don't you think you'd better git him to kill me out of hand? I'm sure I'd ruther be put out of my misery to onct, an' so would Sam Powers here, wouldn't you, Sam?"

Powers, thus appealed to, muttered something which old Ben took for an affirmative answer.

"Ye hears wot he sez, Mr. Denton? Us two sailormen is out of our latitood in this ridin' bisness."

"Nonsense!" said Denton; "don't give up that way, men."

"'Tain't lack of courage, sir. Ye seed how we fit w'en we charged that hull squadron of calavary, didn't ye? But we can't fight a horse noway."

"Oh, you'll be all right in the morning," returned Denton, cheerfully, expressing a confidence he did not feel, "and you'll be better when you get your supper."

"'Tain't want o' vittles wot's worrin' me," said the old man, "though I could stow away a good cargo under hatches, as much as 't is lack of linymint fer my achin' bones."

"He asked me to give my word of honor that I wouldn't attempt to escape," went on Denton.

"An' wot de ye say, sir?" asked the sailor, anxiously.

"Certainly not."

"Right!" exclaimed Powers, suddenly, whereupon Ben turned to him with a look of astonishment in his face.

"W'y, ye actu'ly spoke agin, Sam Powers!" he remarked, "an' spoke to the point, too. In course if we gits a chance we're goin' to cut and run."

"That's what I told him," said Denton. "He laughed and said he'd fix us so that we'd get no chance."

"Well, sir, so long's he don't make us git on them

critters agin to-night, I don't keer wot he does," said Griffin.

The supper, which in spite of their strained muscles and general fatigue was greatly enjoyed, was quickly despatched. After it was over Garcia again presented himself.

"And you will not give me your parole?" he asked once more.

"No!"

"Very well. Then I shall have to take steps to keep you. José, Juan, Chon—here, some of you, bind these gentlemen. I regret this indignity, señor but you force it upon me."

"That's all right," laughed Denton, bravely. "How will you have it done?" he continued, as the guerrillas who had been called came forward with ropes in their hands.

"Your hands behind your backs would be best, I think."

Without a word the midshipman put his hands behind him, where his wrists were securely fastened with rope-lashings by the Spanish troopers. His two companions followed his example.

"Their feet too, captain?" asked the sergeant, who was supervising the matter.

"No, not yet," returned their leader. "March them up the road through the glen until you come to that little cave in the hills which has served us as a hiding-place before now. You know?"

"Yes, señor."

"Put them in there for the night and pull the bushes back in front of the entrance. Bind their feet before you leave them, and keep good watch outside the cave until morning. Take three men with you, one for each prisoner. Don't let them get away. You know what will happen to you in that event."

"Is this cave far?" asked Denton, urged thereto by Griffin.

"About a quarter of a mile, señor."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned the old sailor, who was, indeed, almost helpless from his ride; "howsomnever, so long's I don't hev to git on that horse beast, I guess I kin make it."

"Well, we have to, whether we like it or not," said Denton.

Presently the three men, with their escort heavily armed, set forth. It was a weary plod over the rough road or trail through the hills, but finally, just as the sun set, they crossed the little brook and halted on the slope of the hill before a high broken cliff, where the Mexicans pulled away a heap of brush from the face, revealing the entrance to a small cave.

The tired Americans entered, and immediately sank to the ground. It is probable that at some seasons of the year the brook rose sufficiently high to flood the cave, for the floor was sandy, making it a not uncomfortable resting-place for weary men. Rapidly satisfying himself that it was untenanted,

the sergeant, with the assistance of his men, roped the feet of the prisoners.

The Americans sat with their backs against the sides of the cave as their feet were being bound, and as their arms still remained fastened they were unable to rest in any position with any degree of comfort. Denton begged that their hands might be freed, but the sergeant declared that he had not been given permission to comply with such a request, so they were forced to make the best of their situation. After seeing everything made secure for the night, he and his men went to the outside of the cave, and appointing one of their number to watch disposed themselves to sleep on their serapes under the trees.

CHAPTER XI

A SKIRMISH AND A BOLD DASH FOR FREEDOM

THE Americans talked softly among themselves for a little while, until they were harshly directed by the Mexicans to keep quiet, an order they had no option but to obey. Outside the cave all save the sentry were soon asleep. Poor Denton put himself in every possible position in succession, in the hope that he might get some rest, but each one seemed more uncomfortable than the one he had abandoned. Old Ben had been lying on his face muttering and swearing to himself, while Powers, with his back against the wall, made no complaint.

The boatswain's mate had been thinking desperately, as well as swearing, and when he was satisfied that those outside with the exception of the sentry were asleep, and the quiet inside the cave had probably lulled that person to drowsiness, he began to wriggle over the sandy floor of the cavern toward his young commander as noiselessly as a cat.

"Mr. Denton," he whispered, as soon as he approached near him, "them fellers hev left me a leetle play with my fingers. I never seed the knot, especially one tied by a land lubber, an' a calavary man at that, that I couldn't untie. Kin you turn

your back to me so's I kin git my fingers on your lashin's? Softly, sir! Don't make no noise!" continued the old man as Ned rolled over in compliance with his request.

As he did so the seaman did the same, and the boy and man were now lying back to back. Ben hunched himself along the ground until the tips of his fingers touched the lashings of the midshipman's hands. The fingers of that old man were blunt and hard and horny, but they possessed a marvellous dexterity in the manipulation of rope and the untying of knots. The lashing had not been very skilfully passed, and after working for some ten minutes his efforts met with success. Denton managed to squeeze one hand out of the loosened rope and was free. To untie the ropes that fastened his ankles was the work of a second. Then he turned to old Ben and began to fumble with the knots at his wrists.

"Got a knife, sir?"

"Of course," answered the midshipman, feeling in his pocket, where he had a small jackknife, which had not been taken from him, although the Mexicans had robbed him of his watch, purse, and ring at the first opportunity.

"It'll save time to cut it," suggested the sailor, although it went against his grain to advise the cutting of a knot that might have been untied.

The midshipman whipped out the knife, and in a minute old Ben also was free.

"Now for Powers," whispered the boatswain's mate, but before he could take a step toward him the sound of a shot heard faintly in the night-air rang out from the camp below in the glen. Whatever was the explanation of it the sound quickened the guards of the party into activity at once. The sentry called out in alarm, the sleeping men sprang to their feet in an instant.

"Quick!" cried Denton. "Lie down! Put your hands behind your back as they were! They're coming in here!"

He was down in an instant, his hands behind his back, his feet together, his body lying in the position he had assumed when he was bound. The sailor promptly followed his example. Powers, who had witnessed their manœuvres, being really bound yet, of course did not stir. Fortunately it was quite dark in the cave.

The first shot they heard had been followed by a second, then a third; in fact, the glen was filled with the sound of firearms. They could hear sudden shrieks and yells and cheers from the direction of the camp. What could it be?

After the guard reached the cave the Mexican sergeant sent José down the road to reconnoitre. Then he took position by the side of Denton with his knife at the midshipman's throat.

"Don't make a sound," he whispered, "or I'll kill you where you lie! Tell your men."

Inasmuch as both the sailors were covered in

the same manner by the two remaining Mexicans, Denton's prompt caution was rather unnecessary. There was menace enough in the action of the guards to keep them quiet. Presently José returned in terror.

"The Americanos!" he whispered, "have surprised the camp! They are fighting in the glen. Our men are outnumbered! Hark!"

As he spoke there was a sound of galloping horses. Two or three Mexicans dashed up the trail. The moonlight filtering through the trees flashed upon the gaudy laced uniform of the captain. Hard upon their heels, carbine in hand, some of Peyton's American cavalry burst into view. They were overhauling the Mexicans, and just as the fleeing troopers came opposite the cave Garcia's horse stumbled and fell.

The Mexican was off his horse in an instant; he turned toward the cave, but before he could take two steps the Americans were upon him. He fired his pistol into the face of the first horseman, but the second cut him down with a tremendous sweep of his sabre. That was the end of him. The other two, who had fled with their captain, were shot, and with the death of these three all resistance seemed to be at an end.

Lying on the floor of the cave the three Americans could see nothing, but they surmised accurately what was going on. There was perfect silence in the cave. Save for the fierce whispered threats

of the sergeant and his men, who ordered the Americans not to stir or make a sound or they would be killed, the stillness there was like death itself.

Presently they heard a trumpet down the glen sounding a recall. The dragoons, who had been searching for stragglers through the trees, immediately obeyed the summons and rode back to the camp which they had surprised. Peyton's long pursuit of this guerrilla band had been successful. With three troops of cavalry, numbering some two hundred and fifty men, he had overtaken them, surrounded their camp and surprised them. The Americans killed or wounded the greater part of the bandits, including their captain, and hopelessly dispersed the rest.

Colonel Peyton had not received any tidings of the capture of the midshipman and the seamen, for he had left Vera Cruz on this last endeavor to catch the guerrillas before the unfortunate expedition from the *Mississippi.* Although Commodore Perry had steamed back to Vera Cruz at all speed to report his loss, and messengers with an escort had been despatched to hunt up Colonel Peyton and tell him to look out for the captives, the army officers had not heard the news. Consequently, having completed the capture of the camp, Colonel Peyton, not knowing but that there might be more of the enemy in the vicinity, deemed it best to retrace his steps with the prisoners he had taken.

An hour after the attack the glen was once more

deserted. Sending José out on another reconnoitering mission, and that person reporting that all seemed quiet, the sergeant and his men withdrew from the cave to discuss the situation, never doubting that their prisoners were still securely bound. Denton took instant advantage of their absence to cut the lashings that bound Powers, and now all three men were free.

"Mr. Denton," whispered Ben Griffin, "it seems to me that camp has been surprised. The sogers hev killed or druv off the ruffians wot took us. If we kin dispose of these yer fellers there's nuthin' to prevent our layin' a course back to the coast agin."

"Yes," said the boy, "but we have no arms."

"Beg yer pardon, sir, but one of them keerless fellers left his pistol on the deck here, w'ich I means the floor, w'en he went out. That counts for one man——"

"Me fer another," muttered Powers, clenching his fist.

"I have no weapon," said Ned, "except this jackknife."

"You take the pistol, Master Ned," thrusting the weapon into the boy's hand. "Powers'll use his fists, an' as fer me, I'll bust the head of one of 'em with mine. They'll likely be back here in a jiffy. If one comes we'll settle him easy. If they all come together, you take one, Powers'll take another, an' I'll manage the third. That'll leave jest one.

An' ef I know somethin' he won't stay werry long. He'll part company immejit."

"You're right."

The men outside had been talking excitedly, but they appeared at last to have arrived at some conclusion, for José turned and went into the cave. What he intended to do the Americans did not know. He had no time to explain either, for Powers, who had stepped near the entrance, caught him by the throat at the same instant that Griffin wrested an open knife from his hand. The terrified and surprised man, for he supposed the prisoners were still bound, made but a feeble struggle for a moment until he was choked into insensibility by the iron grasp of the silent sailor. He made some noise as he fell to the ground which attracted the attention of the others.

"José!" called out the sergeant.

There was no answer.

"José!"

Still no answer.

With a muttered curse the man summoned his two companions and entered the cave. He was met by a blinding flash of light and a roar which in the little cave was magnified a thousand-fold. With a beating heart the young midshipman had thrust the pistol in his face and pulled the trigger. The bullet struck the sergeant fair in the forehead and he pitched forward dead. A feeling of horror and pain filled the boy's breast, which only the

thought of the cruel treatment that had been meted out to his own helpless and wounded men enabled him to sustain. At the same moment old Ben buried his knife in the breast of the second man, while Powers caught the third in his mighty arms. Toward this last Griffin turned, knife in hand.

"Don't kill him!" Denton cried, quickly, as soon as he satisfied himself they were masters; "we'll take him prisoner. We may need him. Take his weapons, lash his hands behind his back, Griffin."

In a moment the poor Mexican, shivering and helpless with terror, was disarmed and tightly bound.

"That was han'somely done, Master Ned," said the boatswain's mate.

"Yes, but I'm very sorry I killed him."

The youngster felt very faint and ill at the thought, though he strove valiantly to master his natural emotion.

"Oh, that's nuthin'. It's usual with the fust one. You'll git used to it arter a w'ile," said the boatswain's mate, cheerfully and unconcernedly, wiping the knife-blade on the leg of his trousers.

"Never!" answered poor Ned. "But how are the others?"

"The one you shot is stone dead, sir. The one I cut down likewise. Powers choked his fust man all right. Wot'll we do with him?"

"Is he conscious?"

"He don't seem to be yit."

"Leave him here. I guess he won't trouble us. Now, come on."

The three men, with Powers in charge of the prisoner, left the cave. Each one possessed himself of one of the carbines of the troopers with ammunition boxes, and at Denton's suggestion they foolishly put on coats taken from the dead soldiers in the deserted camp, and replaced their caps with some taken from the Mexicans, the better to disguise themselves, as they thought. Then, after a moment's deliberation as to what was to be done, Denton decided their best course was to follow the road and get back to the shore.

It was not yet eleven o'clock. They were very tired and needed rest, but it was necessary for them to move at once. There were horses around which had broken away when the battle began, but none of the three desired that mode of progression. They much preferred to make their way on foot back to the ship, and so with weary bodies but stout hearts they entered upon the return march.

CHAPTER XII

A TERRIBLE ACCUSATION

It was near midnight before all their preparations were completed, and they started down the rough mountain trail leading through the valley. No signs of the American dragoons appeared anywhere, although the three friends looked eagerly about them in the waning moonlight. The surprise had been so sudden and so complete that the American troopers had not lost a man. With a painful sense of regret, Denton decided at last that they had all withdrawn, and that nothing further was to be hoped for from them. The three friends must make the best of their way to the coast alone.

They had gone but a short distance toward the place where the camp had been pitched when it occurred to old Ben Griffin, who promptly suggested it to the midshipman, that it would be well for them to make a wide detour to avoid the camp, lest some of the Mexicans might have assembled after the departure of the troops, and they should be recaptured. So they abandoned the trail, and, proceeding with the utmost caution while they were in the valley, they struck off at random across the spur of the mountain on the southern side.

So long as the moon shone they got along easily enough, considering their condition, and were enabled to lay their course in the direction of the shore without much difficulty. Their progress was painfully slow, however, for there was no trail, or if there was one they lost it immediately, and when they were not plunging desperately over bare volcanic rock, they were forcing their way through thick and almost impenetrable forests. When the moon set their progress became slower, for in the dense woods they found themselves unable to see the stars which would have given them their direction; nevertheless, they struggled on in what they presently felt was after all mere aimless wandering. They had lost all sense of their whereabouts for some time, and finally they came to a dead stop.

They were all exhausted beyond measure. Human nature could stand no more. Poor Ned Denton was almost ill. He was so much younger than the seamen that his endurance could not keep pace with their seasoned strength. The nervous strain upon the boy, more finely organized and balanced than the others, had been much greater than that they had sustained. For one thing, he could not keep out of his mind the thought that he had actually killed a man. Not exactly in cold blood—but it seemed like it, for the man had been so unsuspicious. It might have relieved the young midshipman's mind if he could have known that the Mexicans had intended to kill him and his comrades,

butcher them while they were bound, and then make their escape. But he did not and could not know that. He felt as he thought a murderer might have felt.

It was all very well blazing away at a ship, or a fort, or a town, with a long thirty-two, or one of the new and deadly Paixhan shell-guns, from the deck of the frigate. People were killed in this manner, of course, but the killing was impersonal and not chargeable to any particular person. In this instance there was no doubt as to who had done it. Although war was his trade, the boy almost felt sick at the thought of the dead man. He had plenty of time to think of it, too, tramping along silently through that long night. For they had striven to make as little noise as possible, and even Ben Griffin had kept measurably still, while Powers, as usual, said nothing.

The youngster would get over this awful feeling in time, and become almost as indifferent as were the sailors, but that did not help him much now. Meanwhile he suffered intensely. He never would forget the hollow cry that burst from the lips of the man he had killed. War had suddenly become a very serious business to him. This, too, so preyed upon him that his physical condition was much worse than that of the other two. At last he found it impossible to go farther.

"Griffin," he said, finally, as they stopped panting on what seemed to be the edge of a little clearing,

"I think we've done about all we can to-night. I don't believe I can go another step to save my life. Let's stop and rest."

He sank to the ground as he spoke.

"Right ye are, Mr. Denton," assented the boatswain's mate, too glad of a chance to rest, himself, to make any objection. "We've about worked this traverse to the end." He followed the example of the midshipman and dropped to the grass by his side. "I'm so mortal tired, sir, I couldn't even lift myself into my hammock, w'ich I ain't got one, but there's nice grass here," he continued, stretching out his hand and feeling about him in the darkness, "w'ich is one of the good things I kin say fer the land. It's got grass on it. An' the only reel green things at sea's the marines! I'll jest take a look at the lashins o' this greaser pris'ner of our'n, an' clap somethin' on his feet, an' then we'll all turn in."

"All right," assented Denton. "I don't think there is any danger now in the middle of this raffle of trees and bushes. I don't believe there's a Mexican around here anyway. My, but it feels good to lie down again," he continued, as he suited the action to the word by stretching himself luxuriously out upon the grass. "'Tisn't half bad as a sleeping berth, Ben."

The night was warm and pleasant, and fortunately dry, so there was no need of covering. The boy was very drowsy and weary, and he was asleep almost before he was down.

First satisfying himself that the prisoner was still securely tied, and making his feet fast with the end of the line about his wrists—and it would be an adroit person indeed who could cast off any lashings secured by old Ben Griffin—the boatswain's mate, followed by Powers, who had grunted his approbation of the plan, also disposed himself for slumber. It might have been safer for one of the three to keep watch, but it would have been nearly, if not quite, a physical impossibility for any of them to do so. Besides, with the improvidence of sailors ashore, they were sure there was no real risk. They were so tired that they dropped off instantly, especially Denton, in spite of the haunting thought of the man he had killed.

They guessed that it was by this time between two and three o'clock in the morning, although they had no means of telling time since Denton's watch had been taken from him by Garcia. They slept almost without stirring until daybreak, when they were suddenly conscious of a wild shout from their prisoner, who, not being so fatigued as they, and being worried as to his probable fate, had slept lightly. In spite of the depth and heaviness of their slumbers they awoke at the call with the ready habit of sailors, who are always summoned that way, albeit the shout was in a foreign language and unfamiliar.

As Ned sprang to his feet in surprise, he was seized by two or three soldiers. He struggled des-

perately for a moment or two, but they held him fast. At the same instant a dozen or so precipitated themselves upon the two sailors. There was a fearful scrimmage for a few moments before these athletic and powerful seamen, even though taken at a disadvantage, could be once more secured. In deed, the futility of their resistance was soon apparent, for the wood was filled with soldiers.

Too late they discovered that their ill-fortune had led them to lie down just on the edge of the forest, along which ran a broad road, which was, in fact, the main highway leading over the mountains to the city of Orizaba. They had become completely lost in the mountains, and had deliberately walked to the edge of the principal thoroughfare in that section of the country, and had gone to sleep in plain view of every passer-by. The Mexican prisoner had awakened earlier than the rest, and as he idly stared toward the road he had been surprised and delighted to see a battalion of infantry come into view. He shouted when they were abreast of them, and the Americans were captured again,

"Well, may I be top-mauled!" exploded old Ben Griffin, ruefully looking toward the men, "if this ain't a low-down trick fer us to be took agin, jest w'en we'd got free. Who'd a-thunk of us bein' rounded to in this way? Them little greasers must be everyw'eres. I guess we don't git back to the frigate none to-day, any of us, eh, Mr. Denton?"

"No, I suppose not," answered the boy, wofully

enough, "we should have kept watch. This is certainly hard luck."

"There's one comfort in it, howsomever. Them fellers ain't calav'rymen. They ain't got no horses, so we won't hev to ride."

"Umph!" said Powers, a ghost of a smile flickering across his solemn face.

"Powers agrees with me as usual, sir, you sees."

"As for myself I am so dead tired, in spite of our nap," said poor Ned, "that riding or walking are equally disagreeable to me."

"Right O! Master Ned. Wot we want is a nice, easy goin' ship that——"

"I wonder what this party is?" interrupted Denton, cutting short the boatswain's mate; then he turned and questioned the nearest Mexican, who seemed to be a sergeant. "Who are you, and where are you from?"

"This is the advance guard of Don Nicolas Bravo's Army of the South, señor. We have evacuated Alvarado, and are marching toward Orizaba," answered the man, who seemed to be in a wonderfully communicative mood.

"What are you going to do with us?"

"I know not, señor. Here comes our officer; he will tell you."

When the officer, who appeared to be a man of high rank, approached nearer to them, he asked if any of the prisoners spoke Spanish.

"I do, a little, sir," promptly replied Denton.

"Señor, I am Colonel Almonte, of the Army of the South, in command of this detachment," said the Spanish colonel. "This brave man here," pointing to their former prisoner, "tells me you are spies!"

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE END OF THE ROPE

THE awful charge shocked the boy beyond measure. So far as he could, he recoiled violently back from the big colonel, who stood over him looking venomously upon him. He felt instinctively that there was little mercy to be expected there. Then he looked toward their late prisoner who made the lying accusation. A smile of fiendish malignity and triumph overspread the Mexican's features. Denton felt completely helpless. The two sailors stared at him, seeing him tremble, but, not comprehending a word of what had been said, could do nothing.

The charge was a deliberate and malicious lie, of course. The man, with the vengefulness of a Spaniard, had quickly determined upon the accusation in order to secure the death of the Americans, whom he held accountable for the annihilation of the detachment, the death of Garcia, and the loss of their plunder. To bring the charge was easy, and, as it turned out, unfortunately for the three Americans, there were circumstances which tended to confirm it.

"That is false, sir," replied Denton, firmly. "I am an officer of the United States steam frigate *Mississippi*, an aide, on Commodore Perry's staff. These are petty officers on the same ship and came ashore in my party. We are not spies. We are prisoners of war and I claim that we shall be treated as such."

He spoke with astonishing boldness and promptitude, although he had a conviction of the hopelessness of the situation.

"The man says," went on the colonel, imperturbably—he was evidently enjoying the inquisition of the midshipman—"that you belonged to a party that raided his camp last night. You were caught prowling around the camp before the attack with the evident purpose of spying on them, and were made prisoners and taken to a cave in the hills. Consequently, you were not freed when Don Garcia's battalion was—ah—dispersed by your comrades. You killed your guard and made your escape afterward."

"That's a dastardly lie, Señor Colonel!" cried Denton, with resolute determination; "we are sailors, not soldiers. We came ashore from the *Mississippi* to get some milk for some sick shipmates yesterday morning and were captured on the beach, and taken to that camp last night. The rest of it is true enough."

"You admit that, do you? Mark, gentlemen, he admits," said the colonel, turning to his officers, who were grouped around the two,

"I admit nothing but what is true," said Denton.

His Spanish was not sufficiently perfect to enable him to master all the shades of meaning in his words or in those of his interlocutor—else he would have admitted nothing.

"The man says," went on the officer, coolly, "that Don Ramon, who is dead, God rest his soul," he continued, devoutly crossing himself, a movement which his officers emulated, "intended to hang you this morning."

"Another lie," said Denton; "he told me himself that he intended to take us to General Santa Anna as prisoners of war."

"A very plausible story," sneered the colonel, "but there is one damnable fact against you. I find three soldiers——"

"We are not soldiers," cried the boy, "we are sailors. Look at those men. Would anybody take them for anything else but sailors? Look at their uniforms——"

Then he stopped, for until that moment he had not realized that they were wearing the uniform caps and coats of the Mexican dead.

"Precisely," said the colonel, mockingly. "Look at their uniforms! They wear our uniform. You do also. It is the First Light Cavalry dress. You know it well, gentlemen," he continued, turning to his staff. "In confirmation of the testimony of this brave soldier, señor, I find you, an American officer by your own statement, within our lines disguised in

a Mexican uniform. The fact is conclusive. I have heard you patiently. You have no defence to offer. You have admitted much, and your presence bears out the rest."

He pulled out his watch and looked at it. Then he said, with mock politeness, for he was a bitter hater of the enemies of his country and a cruel, ruthless man as well:

"In ten minutes, señor, I regret to tell you that I shall hang you and your comrades to the nearest trees. Am I not right, gentlemen?"

"Right!" cried the Mexican officers in ready chorus.

"I protest—" began Denton, passionately.

"You would better employ your time in some other way," returned the colonel, coolly. "Sergeant, see these men are well guarded. Send one of your men to bring some ropes, and make ready for the execution of all three. I regret I have no priest with the advance guard to offer you, señor," he added indifferently, turning on his heel and walking away followed by his staff.

The two sailors had eagerly watched the Mexican colonel and their young commander, but had not been able to understand one word of the dialogue. It was evident to them, from the passionate remonstrances of their own officer and the smiling venom of their captor's replies, that something serious was being discussed by which their fate was being determined.

"Wot did the blamed greaser say, Master Ned?" asked Ben Griffin, as soon as the conversation stopped.

"That lying Mexican prisoner," replied Denton, angrily, "accuses us of being spies. These uniforms we are wearing, coupled with his false testimony, convinced the colonel that we are guilty, at least he says so. I think he wants an excuse, but he's going to hang us in ten minutes—eight, now, I guess."

"We made an awful mistake in not killin' that pris'ner to onct," said the old man, wrathfully. "Did ye tell them where we come from, sir?"

"Didn't you hear me?" cried Denton, hotly—he was so angry and so outraged that he hardly realized the seriousness of the situation yet. "I appealed, protested, it was no use."

"Can't we make a dash for it?"

"Not through five hundred like these."

"Ain't there nuthin' we kin do?"

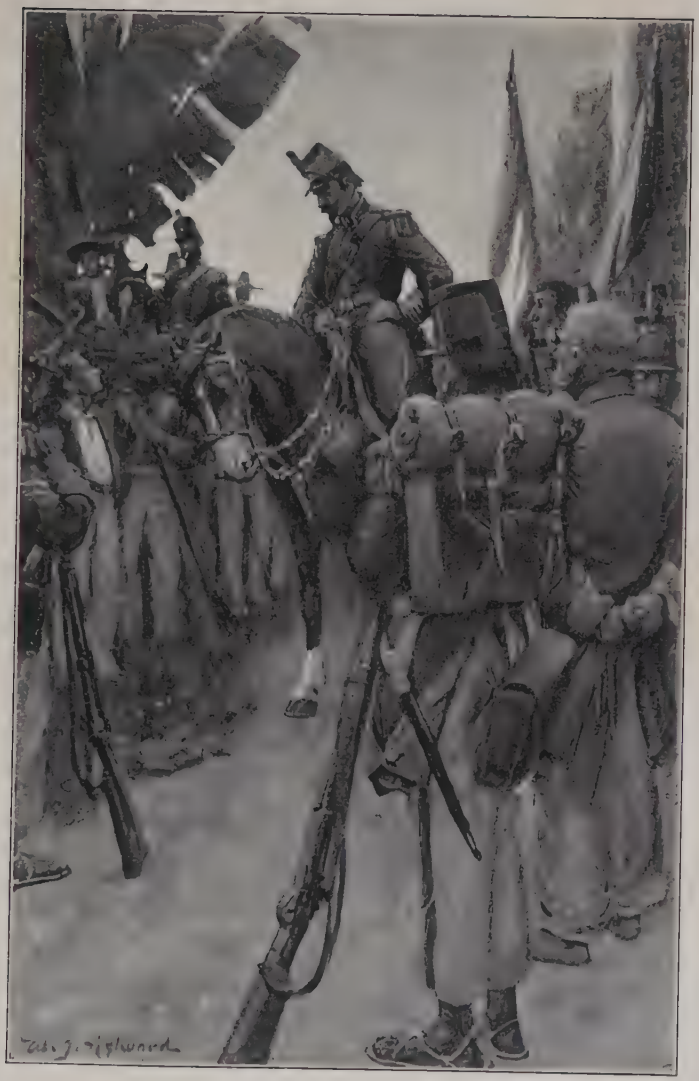
"Nothing. I never was so mad in my life. The idea of hanging us like dogs, and for nothing, on that testimony!"

"There's one thing we can do, sir," said Powers, suddenly.

"What's that?"

"We can show them bloody Mexicans that we kin die like American sailors. That we ain't afeerd of nuthin' they kin do."

"Sam Powers, w'en you do speaks, w'ich it's rare, it's usually to the p'int," said Griffin, gravely,



"I regret to tell you that I shall hang you."

but with hearty approval. "We kin do that, Master Ned."

"Yes, and we will," said the boy, biting his lips. Then as it came upon him, he cried out, "Oh, my father—my mother——"

"Come now, Master Ned," interrupted the boatswain's mate, promptly, looking affectionately at the boy as he spoke, "don't go off on that tack, sir, or you'll run ashore. An' that mustn't be, sir, fer the honor of the flag and the ship. Cheer up, sir. Don't give way. That's no way to talk. It's harder fer you than fer us old chaps, we knows, sir, but death's sure to come to all on us sooner or later. We've got to up anchor an' cruise fer Davy Jones's locker some day, an' we'd ought to be happy if it comes to us in the line of dooty. I'd like it to be some other way," went on the old man, simply, and with a rude eloquence which Ned found very encouraging. "There is better uses for good hemp rope than usin' it fer hangin' honest seamen; but I reckon it's jest as honorable fer us to die that way as if we wus shot down on the decks of the old *Mississippi*—p'raps it's more 'propriate, bein' as how we're sailors. I wish to God we'd never left the ship—an' I'm sartain Powers agrees with me. Don't ye, Sam?"

"Umph!" replied his shipmate, with convincing emphasis.

"Yes, yes," said Ned, "you're right, Ben. It is duty. I'll think of nothing else."

He bit his lip again as he spoke, and, although

the anger at the injustice and cruelty of the summary proceeding which had animated him had left him in view of his peril, he strove valiantly to control himself. It was a fearful, horrible death that was preparing for these three, but they would bear it bravely, and show what an American officer and sailors could do. Old Ben was right. And it was for him to set the example. His was the part to lead, theirs to follow. Yet Ned's face had grown very white.

"Ye won't break down, Master Ned?" asked Griffin, anxiously.

All his solicitude was for the lad he loved. For himself he did not care greatly.

"He won't give way, I know," said Powers, suddenly.

"Never!" returned the boy. "And thank you, Powers."

"Can't they trice us up an' let Master Ned go?" asked Powers, again speaking.

"Agin ye speaks, Sam Powers, an' wisely," said Griffin. "That's a fine ideer," continued the old man, enthusiastically; "tell 'em so, Master Ned."

"I will not!" returned the boy, with spirit. "You can't purchase my safety in that way. We'll die together."

"Then I'll tell," said Griffin. "Does anyone here speak English? Fer God's sake speak out!"

"I do, a leetle," answered one of the soldiers guarding them.

"Griffin, I forbid you to speak!" cried Denton, impetuously. "I order you to keep silent. Don't listen to him, señor."

"It's the fust time in my life I ever disobeyed orders, sir," said the old man, stubbornly, "but I'm goin' to do it now. I've jest got to do it, Mr. Denton."

"Right," said Powers.

"Sir," continued Griffin, "be pleased to ask yer cunnel if he can't take us an' let the young gentleman go free. He's only a boy—fergimme, Master Ned——"

"I won't!" cried the boy, furiously. "I won't accept life——"

"You have no option, señor," interrupted the colonel, coming up at this juncture. "The offer of your men is praiseworthy, but I shall not accept it. You shall all be hanged. You are spies. You are Americans. We hate you all. Your time is up."

"We're ready, you murdering villain!" cried Ned, bravely.

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders and laughed cruelly. The execution of three Americans was a matter of little moment to these ruthless men. They rather enjoyed it, in fact.

"Master Ned," said the boatswain's mate, as the three were dragged under the trees by the side of the road where the execution was to take place. "Do ye fergimme fer not obeyin' ye?"

"Yes, Ben," said Ned, "you did it for the best. Good-by. Good-by, Powers."

"Good-by, sir," replied both men.

The fear which for a time had threatened to possess the midshipman had gone. He had recovered his courage, and with the two sailors he faced his executioners with cool intrepidity. The preparations for hanging were simple indeed. Ropes had been thrown over convenient limbs of the trees, a slip noose was cast about the neck of each American, and the other end of the rope was grasped by a number of the Mexicans. All they had to do was to run them up by main force at the word of command. There was a brutal rudeness about the primitive arrangement which made it the more shocking. Nevertheless, the three faced the situation with undaunted hearts and composed bearing.

"One word, Colonel," said the boy.

"What is it?"

"My name is Edward Boston Denton. This man is Benjamin Griffin, and this is Samuel Powers. We belong to the *Mississippi*, as I said. Will not someone let Commodore Perry know how we died?"

"It is not necessary," returned the officer, shrugging his shoulders; "the fact that you are dead will be learned in due course, doubtless, especially as you won't return to the ship. Time's up."

"May we not be shot instead of hanged?" asked Denton, in one last appeal.

"Hanging is the appointed death for spies. I will give you one more minute for prayers," he continued, calmly taking out his watch. "At the end of that time——"

"Master Ned," said old Griffin, "can't you say a prayer? It don't seem jest right fer us to be a-leavin' this world without a word to sort o' pipe us over the side, fer——"

The midshipman's mind was in a whirl of emotion. Whether he might have broken down finally or not could not be determined, but the old sailor's quiet remark restored him to his self-poise again.

"W'ich I sez 'amen' to that," said Powers.

The boy thought a few seconds.

"Not much time, Master Ned," urged Ben, anxiously.

Their hands had been tightly bound, their feet also. It had not been considered necessary by the Mexicans to cover their faces. The lad lifted up his face toward the sky in the sunny morning and began:

"'Our Father'——"

Then he faltered. He stopped, began again. His voice grew firmer. First old Griffin repeated the words after him, then Powers joined in. At the "Amen" the colonel closed his watch with a snap and lifted his hand.

Denton clenched his teeth and shut his eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

BEAUREGARD AND McCLELLAN SEEK FOR THE PRISONERS

Captain Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard and Second Lieutenant George Brinton McClellan, engineer officers on General Scott's staff, had been sent down from Jalapa to Vera Cruz to hurry up the re-enforcements which were coming to take the place of the troops whose time had expired after Cerro Gordo, and who were going home. General Scott was very anxious to get these troops up with the army so that he could begin his advance on the City of Mexico. Beauregard and McClellan, two of his most valued staff officers, had greatly expedited the first detachment, which they found at Vera Cruz, and they were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the transports with the second when Commodore Perry steamed in with the *Mississippi* and reported the capture of the midshipman and the two men.

Colonel Bowers, the temporary commander of the American garrison of Vera Cruz, had immediately agreed to despatch a messenger to Lieutenant-Colonel Peyton, commanding a battalion of cavalry

already in the field, hunting for Don Ramon Garcia, instructing him to make every effort to get the men. Colonel Bowers was short of staff officers, and men, too, for that matter, since every available soldier had been sent on to join General Scott. The two young engineer officers, time hanging heavily on their hands and the transports with the rest of the re-enforcements not being expected for a day or two, seeing his dilemma, promptly volunteered to carry the message. Indeed, they were glad of the chance to make the expedition.

They were provided with an escort, a flag of truce, and orders for Colonel Peyton and a joint letter from Commodore Perry and Colonel Bowers to the commander of the Mexican troops in the field, which by chance was addressed to General Bravo as the officer of the highest rank known to be on the eastern side of the mountains. When last heard from General Bravo had been at Alvarado, but that place had been captured by the American ships under Commodore Perry, and Bravo had disappeared thence with his force, having made not much of a resistance.

As Orizaba was the most important town to the southwest Colonel Bowers shrewdly surmised that Bravo would try to reach that town. He would have endeavored to intercept his march and bring on an engagement, but his men at Vera Cruz, except Colonel Peyton's cavalry squadron, consisted mainly of invalids. The army was too small to keep

many men locked up in forts, and indeed in that case it was not necessary, as the presence of the navy rendered the port of Vera Cruz absolutely secure.

Although the two young officers rode hard, yet, as we have seen, they had failed to find Peyton before he overtook and destroyed Garcia's band. But they did come across him late that night, returning from the battle-field in the direction of Vera Cruz.

"McClellan," suddenly exclaimed Beauregard to his friend and subordinate, reining in his horse as he spoke. "Hark!" He waved his hand to the escort, who immediately followed his example. "Do you hear anything?"

"Yes, I do," replied McClellan, after listening intently for a few moments. "You're right. Don't you think we'd better draw off under the trees?"

"I agree with you," returned the other.

At a word from Beauregard, who commanded the little party, the horsemen turned to the right, and silently sought shelter under the trees.

"Unsling your carbines, boys, and have them ready for use," said the young officer. "Let no man speak, or make a sound, under pain of death."

"I hope these horses will keep still," said McClellan, as he drew his revolver and cocked it, a movement which Beauregard emulated.

"Yes, if they betray us it would be fatal."

"They are nearer now," continued McClellan, after a little pause.

"Yes. It might be Peyton's party, you know."

"On the other hand it might be Garcia's band," returned Beauregard.

"What would we do in that case?"

"Let them pass us."

"And if we are discovered?"

"Give them a volley, throw them into a panic, ride them down in the darkness, and then light out ourselves the other way."

"Right," said McClellan.

"S-sh!" whispered Beauregard. "They are almost here."

He glanced about in the gloom cast by the trees at his men sitting their horses like statues. They were all veterans, and were waiting a possible imminent danger as coolly as if they were on parade. Every man had loosened his dragoon sabre, and had looked carefully to his carbine.

"Not a sound," whispered Beauregard, again lifting his hand. "Our lives depend upon it."

The horses, as if imbued with the same sense of danger, remained quiet, not even pawing the ground. The road turned just at the place where the two young soldiers had concealed themselves. Consequently the approaching horsemen were not visible until they turned the corner. First came a picket, then an advance guard, then a larger number. The moon was just set, too, and there was not sufficient light to enable those in wait to distinguish whether the advancing men were friends or foes. The

troopers rode down the highway in silence, saying nothing. When the advance guard were just abreast of the Americans under the trees one of the young horses suddenly nickered. The effect was surprising. The line before them halted at once.

"By heaven, we're in for it now!" exclaimed McClellan, lifting his revolver.

"Ready, men!" called out Beauregard, but before he gave the order to fire he heard a sharp command from one of the officers in the road.

Horses wheeled suddenly to the right, and the fading moonlight gleamed on gun-barrels.

"Look out, Captain, no Mexicans ever manœuvred like that," exclaimed McClellan, warningly.

"Who's there?" cried a voice from the darkness in good American. A moment after the words were repeated in bad Spanish. "Answer, or I fire!" cried the voice again.

At the same moment the head of the main body came around the road, the horses at a gallop.

"Don't fire!" cried Beauregard, instantly. "We are Americans—friends."

"Advance, one of you," cried the officer, "and let us see you."

"It's all right, men," continued Beauregard, dropping his pistol in the holster, and riding forward. "I am Captain Beauregard of General Scott's staff. And you are?"

"Lieutenant Pleasants of Colonel Peyton's Ala-

bama cavalry. Glad to see you," the dragoon answered, extending his hand.

"I have a message for your colonel."

"He'll be here in a moment. Will you wait or——"

"I'll wait, thank you."

"What men have you there, captain?"

"A squad of troopers and Lieutenant McClellan, also of the Engineers, and on the commander-in-chief's staff. Oh, McClellan," he called, raising his voice, "bring over the men!"

In a few moments the escort joined the other troops in the road.

"Colonel Peyton is with the main body, of course, but—" explained Mr. Pleasants. "Ah, here he comes."

"What's this, Mr. Pleasants?" cried the colonel, riding up at the moment.

"Two officers and an escort from Vera Cruz," answered Pleasants. "Captain Beauregard and Lieutenant McClellan of the General's staff, with a message for you."

"Good-evening, gentlemen," said Peyton.

"Good-evening, sir," replied Beauregard. "We are charged by Colonel Bowers with the delivery of this letter to you, sir."

"Bring the command to a halt, Major Davidson," ordered the officer. "Though I don't suppose there is a Mexican within five miles of here, you'd better throw out pickets. Fetch me a light,

some of you. Ah!" he continued, breaking the seal and reading the letter by the light of a lantern held by one of his officers; "too bad!"

"Have they been killed, sir?" asked Beauregard.

"I don't know. Unfortunately we raided Garcia's camp this evening, about an hour ago, in fact. We killed Garcia and cut down most of his men, and dispersed the rest. I fancy they are running yet."

"Did you see the midshipman and the sailors?"

"Not one of them. We didn't make a search, knowing nothing about them, of course," continued Colonel Peyton, "but I think nobody saw anything of them. I'll make sure, though. Pass the word among the men, Pleasants, and ascertain if any trace of them was observed by anyone. It's too bad," he went on. "If I had known I should have hunted for them. But it wasn't safe for us to stay there a minute longer. I have information from my scouts that General Bravo, with some three thousand infantry and with cavalry and artillery as well, is retreating to Orizaba from Alvarado. I had to crush that villain Garcia with one sharp blow and then get out of the way. I have only two hundred and fifty men here and they would be but a handful. If I had five hundred more, though, I believe I would ride back and chance it. What men are there in Vera Cruz? Those re-enforcements for General Scott? Could I get the loan of any of them?"

"I'm afraid not, colonel. We sent all who had come, up to date of our arrival, to Jalapa," answered Beauregard.

"When are the others due?"

"Not for two days."

"It will be too late then," said Peyton.

"Well, gentlemen, you will ride back with me, of course. What did you say, Mr. Pleasants?"

"No one has heard a word regarding the young officer and his men, sir," said Pleasants, riding up again.

"You hear, gentlemen?"

"Yes, sir," answered Beauregard. "But in case we did not find you we were to hand a letter to General Bravo from Commodore Perry and Colonel Bowers, which we were to deliver under a flag of truce. Under the circumstances, I think it would be well for us to get it in his hands. The sailors may have escaped or——"

"You are quite right," said Peyton.

"Where can we find General Bravo?"

"Follow this road, and unless he has turned off on the Orizaba road, which leads to the westward about ten miles farther down, you will run into him. If he has turned off, you have only to do that also and follow after. You say there is no chance of my getting a re-enforcement from Vera Cruz?"

"None whatever."

"Too bad. But as a matter of precaution I think I shall stop my retrograde movement right here. I

will select some good defensive position in this vicinity and wait for you. You go forward with your flag of truce and you will find me here all day tomorrow. Of course, if the enemy moves in force against us we shall have to get out, but I do not anticipate that, and I shall be very anxious to learn the result of your mission."

"Very good, sir, we will hasten back here," answered Beauregard.

"Shall you want any more troopers?"

"No, sir," returned the young officer; "in fact, so long as we are going under a flag of truce, I think that Mr. McClellan and I will go alone with two orderlies and a soldier to carry the flag."

"Are your horses in good condition?"

"First rate, colonel."

"Well, I guess they're in better shape than mine, but you are welcome to anything from this command."

"Thank you, sir," said the captain.

"Don't you think it would be better for you to camp here for the night and go down in the morning?" suggested Major Davidson.

"No, sir," answered Beauregard, promptly. "I think it is important that we move at once. Don't you think so, McClellan?"

"I do; we may be too late as it is."

"Well, be careful you don't run into Mexican pickets and get shot in the darkness," said the colonel. "Sorry I can't do anything for you."

"Thank you, sir, we'll do our best to get along," said Beauregard, designating three men to accompany himself and McClellan.

Then they shook hands with the colonel, saluted the other officers, and galloped rapidly down the road through the dragoons. For several miles they rode at breakneck speed, but as they approached near where Bravo's army might be expected, they rode with more caution. Still, they went forward very rapidly, and at daybreak they found themselves at the crossing of two roads. It was the place where the road leading to Orizaba left the main road. At least so they surmised. The practiced eyes of the two engineers discovered that a considerable body of men had recently turned off the main road at that point.

"What do you think of it?" asked McClellan.

"That will be an advance guard," said Beauregard; "they have probably started out and are going before the main body to clear the way."

"Yes, I don't believe more than five or six hundred men have passed. Our best course will be to follow the main road, I think."

"Yes, Bravo would hardly go with his advance guard."

"Come along, then. We would better get out that flag of truce."

Turning to the soldier who carried it, the American captain ordered him to unfurl it and get to the front. They had gone but a few furlongs down the

road, which turned around a hill, when they ran right into the face of Bravo's army, that gentleman, with his staff, riding in front. It was just sun-up at the time. The Americans were halted at once by a picket, and an officer with a squadron of cavalry rode forward.

"Who is this," asked the officer, sharply.

"A flag of truce for General Bravo," said Beauregard. "from Commodore Perry and Colonel Bowers, American commander at Vera Cruz. We are informed that General Bravo's army is travelling along this road."

"That is General Bravo," said the officer, pointing back. "Halt your men here, and ride back with me."

General Bravo, who was one of the most distinguished and gallant officers in the Mexican army, received the Americans graciously, marvelling at their having found him so quickly. He opened and read the despatch.

"I know nothing of the three men," he replied, courteously; "perhaps they have fallen into the hands of Garcia and his band. If that is the case, I fear for them. He is a scoundrel, sir, whom I intend to apprehend if I ever catch him on this march."

"You will never catch him on this march, or any other march," said Beauregard. "His party was surprised and wiped out by Colonel Peyton's dragoons early last evening."

"Where is this Colonel Peyton?" asked Bravo, immediately.

Garcia was a scoundrel, but he was a Mexican, and the general's sympathies were at once engaged for him. He did not want the Americans to attend to his business—he would like nothing better than to get hold of Peyton's party.

"That, sir, it would be improper for me to mention."

"Of course," laughed Bravo, appreciating the answer. "Well, señor, your friends were not observed there?"

"No, General, they may have been held prisoners in the darkness, and have been overlooked by our forces. Perhaps they had previously escaped."

"It may be so. In that case they may have fallen in with my advance guard."

"The body of men that turned off on the Orizaba road?"

"Yes," answered the general. "Well, sir, you may assure Commodore Perry and Colonel Bowers that their men shall be treated as prisoners of war if they get into my hands."

"They never doubted that, sir, answered Beauregard, tactfully; "they know the reputation of General Bravo as a humane as well as a gallant soldier, but they feared for them in the hands of Garcia."

"Quite so," answered the general, who was much pleased with the compliment.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but would you object to

our riding after your advance guard under this flag of truce, to see if they have heard about these men?"

"Certainly not," answered Bravo, "they have only half an hour the start of us. I will send Colonel Miramar of my staff with you, Captain Beauregard," continued the general. "Colonel Miramar!" he called, "go with these gentlemen to Colonel Almonte, and if the men they are after are with him direct him to see that they are well treated."

"Very good, sir," replied Miramar, saluting. "Come, señors."

"Good-by, general, and thank you," said Beauregard.

"Good-morning, sir. My compliments to Colonel Bowers, and congratulate him upon his choice of officers to bear his flag. I hope we may meet again, young gentlemen, as soldiers and enemies on the field of battle," continued the Mexican general, gallantly.

"I hope so," returned both officers, saluting gravely as they rode off, followed by Colonel Miramar.

CHAPTER XV

COLONEL MIRAMAR ARRIVES IN TIME

"If you have no objections, Colonel Miramar," said Beauregard as they cantered down the road, leaving the slow-moving infantry out of sight as they turned the hill, "I should like to ride more rapidly, as I fear something may happen, although I scarcely know what could."

"At your wish, señor," returned Colonel Miramar, spurring his horse into a gallop which grew faster and faster until the whole party were fairly racing up the road.

It was not long before they caught sight of a body of men down in a valley by the side of the road.

"Almonte does not keep very good watch," said Colonel Miramar, frowning with displeasure as he observed the advance guard huddled in disorder under the trees. "His ranks seem broken. I wonder what's the matter?"

There appeared to be a crowd of men gathered in one spot. It was all most unsoldierly and most unofficerlike to the American officers as well as to the Mexican colonel, but of course they said nothing.

"By heavens!" suddenly exclaimed Lieutenant McClellan, who was unusually keen-sighted, "it's an execution! See the ropes hanging to the trees!"

"Can it be our men?" cried Beauregard, striking spur into his stallion. "Forward, gentlemen! Faster!"

The horse of the Mexican officer, being much fresher than that of the others, at once sprang to the fore and moved rapidly away from them.

"Save them!" yelled Beauregard after him, "if you can."

Muttering a brief prayer Beauregard and McClellan urged their horses to further exertions, but it was quite evident that they could not arrive in time. Their hopes rested upon Miramar with his horse, and bravely did both respond to the occasion. The horse was a thoroughbred and perfectly fresh. He galloped down the road toward the assemblage under the trees at a terrific pace.

"Will he be in time?" exclaimed McClellan in an agony of apprehension.

"I can't tell."

"They may not be our men."

"I reckon they are, though. I hope he may be in time," answered Beauregard. "Hark! He's calling."

It was true. Miramar was still too far off to interpose personally. From his position above them on the hill he could see by the movements of the men that they were about to swing the prisoners

up. Just as Colonel Almonte closed his watch and lifted his hand a sharp cry broke the stillness.

"Stop!" cried a voice of authority.

Ned Denton opened his eyes once more. He had never expected to open them again on this earth, and then his glance fell on an officer, mounted on a big black horse, bursting through the crowd. The little red-coated Mexican soldiers scattered out of his way, for he was riding at a furious rate. His horse was panting from the last mad run. Such was the excitement his appearance produced that the men holding the ropes dropped them. The boy suddenly felt the pressure of the noose around his neck relax.

"Colonel Almonte!" cried Miramar, throwing his horse back on his haunches directly in front of the prisoners. "What are you about, sir? Who are these prisoners?"

"Spies, Colonel Miramar, whom I am hanging. Why do you interfere?"

His voice plainly indicated his annoyance at this unlooked-for and unwelcome interruption. "Pick up the ropes, men, and haul away," he continued, angrily.

"Stop!" cried Miramar.

"By whose order?"

"General Bravo's."

"We are not spies," cried Denton, suddenly finding his voice, "but three American sailors."

"Ha! I thought so," said Miramar. "Colonel

Almonte, you have made a most serious mistake. These are prisoners of war. The general orders that they be treated as such."

With a muttered curse the colonel signed to his men to release the prisoners. By this time Beauregard and McClellan had joined the advance guard. The Mexican soldiers surrounded them with threatening gestures, until Miramar sharply ordered them to let the American officers alone.

"And Colonel Almonte," continued Miramar, severely, "I find your ranks in great disorder, sir. You will reform your men and proceed on your way. I will relieve you of the charge of these prisoners, sir."

Almonte was furious, but as the staff officer represented General Bravo, his superior, there was nothing he could do but submit with the best grace he could master. He gave the necessary orders accordingly. Before doing so, however, he inquired of Miramar who Beauregard and McClellan were.

"Americans under a flag of truce from Colonel Bowers at Vera Cruz, to invoke the protection of General Bravo for these prisoners against Garcia."

"Garcia's band has been wiped out," answered Almonte, "but there is one of his men who says these men are spies."

"Where is the man?" cried Miramar. "Bring him forward! General Bravo has vowed to hang every member of that dastardly band as soon as he

catches them. Ha! is that he?" continued the officer as a man burst from the group and ran toward the trees. "After him, some of you!"

A half dozen soldiers started in the direction of the fugitive, who was soon overtaken. As he saw them approach he faced about suddenly, whipping out a knife. Two of the soldiers fired and the Mexican was down and out in an instant.

"Well done!" said Miramar. "Colonel Almonte, you have acted under a misapprehension. No blame can attach to you. We will take the prisoners back to General Bravo. You may resume your advance, sir. General Bravo bade me say that Colonel Peyton's battalion of cavalry is in the vicinity, and that it will be well for you to look carefully to avoid a surprise."

"Very good, sir," said Almonte, ill-temperedly. "My young sir," he continued, turning to Denton, "I congratulate you. Another second and Colonel Miramar had arrived too late."

His words were courteous, but his malevolent look belied them.

"No thanks to you, you murdering villain!" exclaimed Ned hotly, and, it must be confessed, rashly as well.

The colonel's dark face flushed angrily. He clapped his hand to his sword hilt and strode over to the boy. He had been very much tried by Miramar's arrival and interference, and the public reproof he had received for the state of his command.

"Stay!" called out Miramar, warningly. "He is only a boy."

"I'm big enough to fight him," cried Denton, pluckily.

That was a kind of danger he could face without difficulty.

"He is a prisoner of war. You cannot meet," continued Miramar, formally. "That will do, young sir. You are in my charge. Come."

"Well," said old Ben Griffin as they took the noose from his neck, "I've been putty familyer with ropes all my life, but I don't want no necklace of 'em around my neck agin, eh, Powers?"

Powers, as usual, only grunted.

"I am Captain Beauregard and this is Lieutenant McClellan of General Scott's staff, young sir," said Beauregard, turning to Denton, "and you are——?"

"Midshipman Denton of the *Mississippi*, and these are my men," returned Ned.

"I am very glad we found you," returned Beauregard, shaking the boy's hand warmly.

"You came just in time, sir," said the boy, gratefully.

"Yes," said McClellan. "It was Colonel Miramar's gallant ride that did it. You must thank him for his promptness."

"Sir, I thank you," said the boy. "We wouldn't have been here to thank anybody if you had been a second longer, sir. We are most grateful to all of you," continued Ned, extending his hand.

"Dash my toplights!" put in old Ben as he listened to the discussion; "ain't it good to hear people talkin' good United States agin? Eh, Powers?"

"Will you have a horse to ride back to General Bravo, Mr. Denton?" asked Miramar.

"No, sir," said the boy, who very much preferred to walk.

"Very well. Come along, then."

"Captain Beauregard, are you going to take us away?"

"I am afraid not," said that officer; "you are prisoners of war, you see, and we are here under a flag of truce by permission of General Bravo."

"Do we have to go back to those Mexicans again?"

"Yes. The most we can do is to insist upon your receiving the usual treatment accorded prisoners of war."

"Oh, very well," answered Denton, surveying with interest the two American officers, who both happened to be men of small stature, so small that if they had been on the ground they would not have been taller than he. These two men, intimate friends, were afterward destined to take different sides in that great Civil War, both achieving fame and reputation while commanding large armies and fighting great battles. A little distance down the road the party came upon General Bravo and his staff again.

"We got there just in time, general," said Colonel Miramar, saluting.

"You have the prisoners there?" asked the general.

"Yes, these are they. They were just about to be hanged, sir, when I arrived on the scene."

"How was that?"

"Through a mistake. A member of Garcia's band had insisted they were spies."

"I am glad you saved them, gentlemen."

"It was not we who did so, but your colonel," replied McClellan. "His horse was fresher than ours, and by a gallant burst of speed he reached there just in time. Isn't it so, Beauregard?"

"Certainly, Lieutenant McClellan, and I would not have been able to save them had it not been for Colonel Miramar."

"That was well done, Colonel Miramar. I am pleased with you. Now, gentlemen, tell Colonel Bowers that Mr. Denton and his men shall be treated honorably as prisoners of war on the faith of General Nicolas Bravo."

"We shall do so."

"Young gentleman, if you will give me your parole not to escape while in my charge——"

"I won't do it!" exclaimed Denton. "We didn't do it before and we escaped."

"I should advise you to give the word in this instance," interrupted Beauregard, quickly. "It is an easy matter to get away from a marauding party of

fifty men, but not so easy to escape from several thousand. Your parole only covers you while in General Bravo's charge, you know. You will be much more comfortable, and the chances for escape between now and Orizaba are not good. In fact, it is impossible. I should not try it. We'll move for your prompt exchange anyway."

"Very well, then, I'll take your advice," said Denton. "General Bravo, I will give the parole for myself and men."

He turned and explained rapidly to his seamen.

"You do wisely, sir," said the general; "you can ride with my staff. The men with the escort yonder."

The boy looked about ruefully at this.

Captain Beauregard whispered something in the general's ear, at which he burst into a hearty laugh.

"Sailors, eh? and poor horsemen? Well," he said, "until they recover they can make use of one of my headquarter wagons. Now, gentlemen, having despatched your errand——"

"We were just about to ask your permission to return," said Beauregard.

"You have it," returned the general.

"Good-by, Mr. Denton."

"Good-by, Captain Beauregard. Good-by, Lieutenant McClellan. Will you tell the commodore to let someone on the ship write to my father and mother and tell them I am safe so far?"

"I shall do so. Good-by. Good-morning, general."

"Good-morning, gentlemen."

Denton and the two sailors, who had been so near death's door a second time, looked after the retreating young officers and their escort with wistful glances. It would be a long time, they fully realized, before they were to see the army blue, and longer still before they set foot on the deck of a ship. But their lives had been saved, as it were, by the skin of their teeth that morning, and they were thankful. They clambered into the wagon General Bravo had so kindly offered them, munched some bread and cold meat which was given them, then threw themselves down on the tent canvas and other soft material with which it was packed, and immediately went to sleep.

CHAPTER XVI

IN A MEXICAN PRISON

THE journey to Orizaba was made without any further adventures to Denton and his two companions. After their arrival at that point General Bravo, in accordance with his promise, caused them to be treated with kindness and consideration, and, save for the fact that they were prisoners of war, their lot was not an unpleasant one. There was much to interest them in the quaint old Mexican city on the slope of the mighty volcano from which it was named.

Although their opportunities for sightseeing were of necessity somewhat limited, yet, with the careless irresponsibility of sailors ashore, they enjoyed themselves to the top of their bent—especially the boy. Having repeated his parole for himself and his men, they were allowed an unusual degree of liberty by the general, a brave spirit, who had taken a great fancy to Denton; and the youngster and his two grim old attendant sea-dogs soon became objects of much interest to the inhabitants of Orizaba.

After they had been there a few weeks, General Scott, having recruited his army and completed all his preparations, cut loose from his base at Jalapa and descended into the valley of Mexico to effect the capture of that city. The garrison at Orizaba under General Bravo was at once summoned to join the main army encamped about the capital, under the personal command of General Santa Anna himself.

It was deemed proper, under the circumstances, that the three Americans, who constituted the only prisoners in the southern department, should be sent to the City of Mexico for safer keeping, in charge of the rear guard of the Southern army. They had hoped that they might be exchanged. Indeed, negotiations of some sort had been entered upon through General Scott's headquarters, but they had come to nothing. General Bravo had gone to the front with the main body, leaving the command of the rear guard to Colonel Almonte, whose hatred toward Denton had been increased by the boy's bold defiance during the hanging episode, and by the contemptuous indifference afterward exhibited by him. He immediately proceeded to make his presence felt.

As soon as General Bravo's back was turned they were denied all liberty, every privilege they had enjoyed was abrogated, and they were forced to march with the foot soldiery of the army. If sailors are proverbially bad horsemen, they are almost as bad

marchers, and the journey toward Mexico in the summer heat was a terrible one for all three. Fortunately it did not occur to Colonel Almonte to separate the friends, for, indeed, the two devoted seamen stood in that relationship to the midshipman, so they were permitted to march together. They saw much to dismay them. It happened that they approached the capital city from the southward, which was the direction from which Scott had elected to undertake to enter, and what they noticed of the preparations for resisting the American army filled them with foreboding.

Generally speaking, the country about the City of Mexico was swampy and marshy. It had been habitually overflowed in the rainy season during the Aztec dominion two centuries before—indeed, the city had been practically an island in those times—and the valley had only been imperfectly drained of late. The lakes still remaining once extended from the city walls to the Rock of Chapultepec, although since the drainage works had been finished they had greatly decreased in size.

During the rainy season, which was then upon them, every place but the main highways softened into quagmires, almost impassable. The roads owed their immunity to the fact that they were elevated above the surrounding country. They were, in fact, long causeways of stone, bordered in some cases by stone walls. They were substantially built and sufficiently wide not only for the abundant traffic of

peace, but for military operations as well. They were well paved and were defended by formidable fortifications erected on the borders of the roads themselves, or covering them from magnificent heights, like that at the foot of Lake Texcoco, called El Penon, which bristled with intrenchments and heavy batteries, or from such points of vantage as Chapultepec itself.

Westward from one of the roads there extended a vast broken mass of volcanic rock called El Pedregal. It was bare of vegetation and was thought to be an insurmountable barrier for any military expedition. In short, the only access to the city between the morasses and swamps intersected by deep ditches, on the one side, and the masses of rock like the two mentioned, which here and there rose above the general level, on the other, were the causeways. These were protected by scientifically planned defences, and to the Americans there seemed to be no lack of soldiers to man all of the extensive works.

By Denton's direction the men kept their eyes open, endeavoring, as old Ben said, to chart the rocks and roads and byways in their minds, so they could make their way back over them in the dark if they got a chance to escape. And he hoped that if they did escape, or were exchanged, his observations might be useful to the American army. Yet the undertaking before Scott and his small army seemed to the inexperienced boy almost to be an impossible one. His heart sank at the thought that if he and

the seamen depended upon the successful advance of that army for release from their captivity, they might have to spend the rest of their lives in prison.

The noble City of Mexico was situated in one of the most beautiful valleys in the world. They saw it with its white walls and green trees against a background of snow-crowned mountains of the most magnificent proportions. As a city it was then one of the largest and most beautiful on the western continent, with broad, regularly laid-out streets and avenues, well paved and well kept, abounding in buildings of imposing architecture, notably the magnificent cathedral. In spite of all this the Americans had no desire to live and die there, especially as prisoners.

As they approached the city they passed through a little village called Churubusco, and took especial note of a formidable fort protecting a bridge, which carried the main road over a deep ravine half ditch, half river, called Churubusco Creek. Farther on and much nearer to the city they observed a high precipitous rock, which rose from the plain almost sheer on three sides. Its base was encircled by fortifications of some sort. Its top was crowned by a formidable castle. On the gentler slope there were thick groves of trees which had afforded shade to the rulers of the capital from time immemorial. They learned that this was the famous rock of Chapultepec. It had been the palace of Montezuma and Guatemoc and their Aztec forebears ; then

the summer house of the Spanish viceroys; next, one of the official residences of the Mexican Presidents, and finally the seat of the Mexican Military Academy; now the last and most powerful defence of the city—outside the walls, that is. They looked at it carefully as they passed.

Leaving Chapultepec and its castle behind them, they soon approached the Garitas Belen, that is, the Belen Gate, a well-fortified entrance to the city, mounting a number of heavy guns adequately manned. A handsome aqueduct, carried on arches of masonry, ran down the centre of the paved causeway, which was broad enough to admit of a road on either side of the aqueduct. There were towers on the aqueduct and further barricades between the arches to enable the Mexicans to hold the roads.

Entering the city the Americans were astonished at what they saw in the busy and populous place, which as yet presented little evidence of the existence of war in the land, save such as was afforded by unusual numbers of gayly dressed soldiers thronging the streets. Here the prisoners excited some little attention, too, for, though the Mexican army had taken some prisoners, they were sufficiently few in number for an American to be a rarity, especially in the capital.

Some of the women, staring at the passing soldiers and their captives from between the slats of their Venetian blinds, felt a thrill of compassion as they saw the pale-faced lad trudging bravely

along before his two gigantic attendants, and all surrounded by the troops. That thrill of compassion, in one especially, was to produce surprising results of which the prisoners did not dream then. Colonel Almonte, riding at the head of his troops, twirled his mustache fiercely, and appeared as proud as if he had captured an army instead of a boy and two sailors.

The prisoners were immediately put in one of the common jails. Denton might have secured better quarters by protesting and pleading his rank, but that would have separated him from his faithful followers, a thing he did not even wish to contemplate. The days thereafter passed drearily enough. Nothing particular occurred to break the monotony. They heard nothing from the American armies. They had not the slightest idea what, if anything, was happening. They might just as well have been buried alive.

During their confinement old Ben Griffin became more garrulous than ever, and, by contrast, Sam Powers appeared more taciturn. The boatswain's mate exerted himself to cheer his young officer, and in the endeavor he told and retold every yarn he ever knew, described every adventure in which he had ever participated, and invented a great many for the delectation of his comrades. Denton had begged for some books, but there were none available save Spanish books, with the language of which he was scarcely sufficiently familiar to make much out of

them. The seamen were denied the solace of their beloved tobacco. In spite of all Ben's valiant efforts to comfort the party, their spirits sank down to the zero mark, when a circumstance lifted them suddenly to the seventh heaven of hope.

To inspect the American prisoners in jail had become a frequent and popular relaxation with social Mexico. At first the high-spirited boy had writhed under the comments which had been made by the curious and thoughtless strangers who passed outside the grated door which separated the cell in which they were confined from the corridor. People of refinement and culture apparently, if their clothes and bearing were any indication, would stare through the grating and make all sorts of remarks with the utmost freedom, especially concerning the boy, a very attractive lad, who appealed to them. Possibly they were thus frank in expressing their opinions because they did not know that he could understand Spanish.

After the prisoners had become hardened to this annoyance, or rather the boy had, for the two sailors had rather enjoyed it all, they began to observe their visitors with more care, and sometimes discussed them as they had opportunity. They noticed after awhile that one woman came several times. She was always in company with a party, yet she never said anything about the prisoners, or made any comments upon their appearance, although the rest generally spoke freely. This in itself was a

strange circumstance and attracted their attention to her.

When she came again, seizing an opportunity when she was not observed by the guard or her companions, she ventured to wave her hand to the boy, after fixing her eyes upon him in such a way as to attract his particular attention. She was an elderly woman, and he wondered what she could mean by her gestures. The woman was dressed as the others had been, but she did not look like a Mexican. She was a fair woman, with light hair and blue eyes.

Denton communicated the incident to his friends after the visitors had withdrawn and they discussed it with great interest. Finally they decided that possibly he might have been mistaken, but the next time she presented herself—an interval of two or three days having elapsed—she made the same signal! This time they all saw her movement, there was no mistake. They felt unusually cheered by the thought that somebody was sufficiently interested in their welfare to make some gesture to them. It evidently meant something, although they could not tell what it was. There was hope in their hearts once more.

They waited therefore with growing eagerness till her next appearance. They waited for some time. The woman had no regular time for coming, of course. There was always someone coming and going in the corridor to view the Americanos, and the

three prisoners soon realized that this particular woman could not come too often without attracting attention and exciting suspicion. She was the woman, it may be said, who had felt the thrill of compassion as she witnessed their march past her house to the jail.

The next time she did come, however, she lingered behind the rest for a second, and, taking advantage of an opportunity afforded by the guard's turning his head away, she snapped a tight little paper billet, rolled into a small ball, into the cell. It fell in front of the boy, who immediately put his foot upon it. When the guard, who may have heard the fall, looked around, the woman had gone with her party, and the three prisoners stood just as they had been standing when he saw them a moment before. The sentry stared at them a second or two and passed on.

The midshipman had grown remarkably shrewd in his wanderings and stood quietly, making no effort to pick up the paper, although the men urged him to do it at once. His forethought was justified when the guard suddenly came back to the door and peered in again. If they had been reading the paper or doing anything unusual, his suspicions would have been confirmed. As everything presented the usual appearance, he concluded that he had been mistaken, dismissed the subject from his mind, and passed on. Then Ned opened the paper.

"I am an American woman," was written in a small, clear hand. "I have a Mexican husband. I

feel sorry for you. Your prison is located by the south wall. If you can break out only one man, a sentry, is likely to be between you and the outer walls. Opposite the prison the wall has crumbled, so that a sailor could scale it. I will get a file to you in some way. File the bars, and if you care for freedom try to escape. The American army is approaching. I have not forgotten the Stars and Stripes!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE ESCAPE

"WELL, may I be keel-hauled!" ejaculated Ben Griffin as the contents of the note were made known to him. "An' to think I've allus had sech a bad opinion of feemale wimmin! This one desarves to be a bo's'n's mate. We must hev mistook her sex."

"You'll try to do it, then?" asked Denton.

"Try it, sir! I'd do anythin' ruther than lay anchored in this yer brig* until this old prison grounds on her beef-bones."

"I wonder how long it would take us to file through two bars?" continued the midshipman.

"We'd ought to finish a bar a night. But you'll hev to file more'n two bars, Mr. Denton. You could get through them an' p'raps Powers could, but I'll hev to hev three took off."

"Lift me up, Powers," said Ned, "so that I can take a look at them."

The old man lifted the boy, swung him to his shoulder, and stepped toward the bars.

"They're an inch thick and embedded in cement

* The place of confinement in a ship of war is called "the brig."

at the bottom," said Denton, as he made a hasty examination.

"How's the top, sir?" asked Griffin.

"Just a hole—a socket for them to fit in."

"Good! We'll only hev to cut through the bottom, an' then haul 'em away."

"Yes, that's right," answered Ned, making a further examination.

"Someone's comin'!" whispered the boatswain's mate, warningly, and Denton had just time to slide to the floor again before the sentry passed by on another inspection.

"How will we file them?" asked the boy when the guard had gone.

"Me an' Sam Powers will take turns at holdin' you up, sir," answered Griffin. "W'en we gits that file, that is. You kin file each bar all through but a thread to keep it stiddy, an' then w'en the time comes we'll bust out."

"Let me take another peep," said Denton.

Again Powers lifted the boy up. Ned peered out of the window. Opposite him, about ten feet away, was the wall of the city. They didn't know it before, of course, but had supposed it to be another building. They had no idea where they had been taken in their roundabout course through the city. The confirmation of the genuineness of their mysterious companion's offer to help was found in the condition of the wall. It was in a bad state of repair, on the inside, that is. The boy and the

men were accustomed to climb, and, with liberty as an incentive, he thought they would have no difficulty in getting up. Denton reported what he saw to his two companions.

"If we get out we can easily get to the top of the wall. But how to get down on the other side is a question."

"Well," said old Ben, "let's git over fust, an' decide arterwards wot we'll do. As fer me, I'd ruther be shot than stay here any longer. Of all the 'speriences I've gone through sence we started out to milk that fool cow critter, this is the wust. Let's up anchor an' off. I'm tired of bein' moored head an' starn in sech a quiet place. I'd give a good deal to feel a loo'ard roll once more, an' git a breath of fresh sea-breeze 'stead of this foul bilge-water smell of this yer stone brig. Besides, I've got a sneakin' idear that we'll come out of this scrape somehow. Jest think how near we wus to gettin' swung up, an' we're alive yit, w'ich I never expected to be. As fer me, I votes to try it, but in course under your orders, sir," said the old man, looking rather quizzically in the twilight of their cell toward the boy.

"What do you think about it, Powers?" asked Denton.

"Try it, sir," laconically replied the man of few words.

"Wot are them words I've heard o-ray-ters usin'," said Ben. "Gimme the dissyplin' an' freedom of a

ship, they sez, or gimme death! Them's yer sentiments, too, ain't they, Sam?"

"Umph!" said Powers, it being almost the second time he had spoken during a week.

"All right, then," answered Denton; "if that unknown lady can get us the file we'll try it."

With what feverish anxiety the three waited for another visit from their mysterious benefactress may be imagined. The same course of procedure which had been followed before was successfully pursued when the woman came once more. This time the letter was briefer but more explicit.

"I have bribed the baker. File in loaf. There is a water barrel beneath the window. Back of it a coil of rope. I can do no more. I shall not come again, to avoid suspicion. God bless and aid you!"

They could hardly wait until night for the arrival of the loaf of bread which constituted the main part of their evening meal. Sure enough, when they broke it apart there was the file. That night they set to work. The cell was closed at night by a heavy door, so that they could work away without fear of interruption. Powers lifted the midshipman up, then braced himself against the wall, while Ned knelt on his shoulders and sawed away. He was not skilful in the use of the file either, and it took him a long time to finish one bar and half of another. He filed the bars close down to the sill of

the window, and as the walls were thick and the sills wide no one could see that the grating had been tampered with unless he climbed up and made a close examination.

It was four o'clock before they desisted. Griffin had relieved Powers from time to time in supporting the midshipman. Indeed they stood watch and watch for the purpose, but Denton of necessity kept at it all the time and was thoroughly exhausted. They concluded that it would not be well to do anything further that night. The guard who entered their door in the morning to give them their breakfast had a hard time to awaken all three, they were sleeping so soundly. Unfortunately the suspicions of the guard seemed to be aroused by this strange fact, and they were kept under somewhat stricter surveillance for a day or two, so much so that it was decided not wise to make any further attempts until the suspicion had been lulled.

Two nights after, nothing having occurred in the interval to confirm the suspicions of the guard, they began work again on the remaining bars. Ned completed the sawing of the second bar and cut clean through the third. His practice before stood him in good stead and he made much more rapid progress than he had when he first tried it. He could get through the opening which would be left by the withdrawal of three of the bars very easily. Powers, who was a tall man, although not so stout as Griffin, could also get through, but Griffin, who

was very large, said he would squeeze through in some way, so they decided to try it then and there.

It was then perhaps three o'clock in the morning and very dark. It had been raining all day and the atmosphere was full of fog and mist. After he had filed the three bars completely through Denton slipped to the floor. Old Ben Griffin, by a huge effort, lifted Powers up to the window, Denton reenforcing the boatswain's mate's efforts as best he could. Powers, by the exercise of his prodigious strength, succeeded in hauling out the bars, which were but lightly cemented at the top, and came away after some hard pulling, on account of their being cut through at the bottom.

"Who's fust?" he queried laconically as he dropped back into the room when the way was open.

"I," returned Denton.

"Don't you think it would be better for Powers or me to go fust, sir?" asked Griffin.

"No, it is my right. I'll climb through and drop down. I'm the lightest and will make less noise. I shall stay right where I light, and then Powers will come, and, last of all, you."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Griffin and Powers, their fingers going to their forehead in salute as the problem was solved in the youngster's peremptory words.

"If any one of us gets away and the others are captured, or anything happens to us, the survivors

will report the events of this journey to the commodore. Do you understand?"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered both men.

"It's a risky undertaking," said the boy, "and we may just as well shake hands before we go. You have stuck to me like the true sailormen you are, and I am proud to have been associated with you and to have commanded you," he continued, striving to conceal his emotion in the stateliness of his remarks.

The two men wrung his hand heartily.

"Now, sir, up ye go!" said Griffin as Powers lifted the boy to the window-ledge.

He crawled through the bars, grasping the remaining ones with his hands, swung himself over the sill, and at the last moment, remembering the water barrel mentioned in the note, threw himself far from the window, which was only about ten feet from the ground, and alighted safely on his feet. Fortunately there was grass on the ground and he made no sound whatever. He could see no sentry, but had no doubt there were plenty of men on guard near by. The woman who had helped them had spoken of the probable presence of one at least. He looked up at the window in time to see Powers swing himself from the ledge.

"Look out for the barrel!" whispered the boy, pushing the man's legs aside. Powers, with this warning, swung clear and alighted on the grass at the foot of the window in safety. Just as he scram-

bled to his feet, however, the form of a soldier came shoving through the black mist. He didn't see the two Americans until he ran right into them. He dropped his piece to a charge on the instant and cried :

" Who goes there ? "

Powers was in front of him, Denton off to one side. The eye of the soldier was fixed on Powers. The boy made a desperate flying leap and bowled the soldier over like a ten-pin. They went crashing to the ground together, the piece of the soldier being discharged in the fall. It sounded like the report of a cannon to the astonished sailors. Denton scrambled to his feet in an instant, and Powers leaped upon the prostrate man. However, the Mexican soldier had fallen so heavily that he was senseless, or else scared to death, for he lay quiet and still. Just at this instant Griffin, who had had a dreadful squeeze through the narrow opening, dropped out of the window. No one warned him in the confusion, and, souse! he went into the water barrel !

He swore fiercely as he struck the cold water, and in his struggles overturned the barrel, precipitating himself on the ground by his comrades. Even in their danger Ned, who was enough of a boy to see the comical part of the adventure, had great difficulty to keep from laughing. The discharge of the gun and the fall of the sailor in the barrel had made a tremendous noise, and to add to all this old

Griffin was swearing as only an able seaman, especially a boatswain's mate, angered and excited, can swear.

Shots and alarms were heard from the sentries on either side of the ramparts from where they stood. There were calls for the guard. A drum was beaten. They had no time to lose. Powers picked up the musket of the Mexican sentry they had knocked over. A man came running out of the darkness toward them. The sailor was not familiar with the use of the bayonet, so he clubbed the musket and brained the man before he had time to make a cry.

"We're discovered!" cried Denton, helping old Griffin to rise to his feet. "We've only a minute to try the wall. Here is the broken place."

Throwing aside the gun and picking up the coil of rope from behind the barrel, where their unknown friend had caused it to be placed, Powers made a dash at the wall, followed by the other two. How they got up it they never knew, but with torn clothing and bleeding hands they at last reached the top. The person who had provided the rope had had forethought to cause a stout iron hook to be fastened to the end of it. With their feet they drove it firmly into a crevice of the masonry.

"I goes over fust this time," whispered old Ben; "ye don't know wot you're goin' to bump up agin' on that side."

Suiting the action to the word he seized the rope, dropped over the parapet, and slid down in the dark-

ness. There was a sudden, mighty splash at the other end, followed by more language.

"Water agin!" said Powers, chuckling.

"I go next," said Denton. "Griffin can't swim."

He also slid down safely and was received in the arms of the sailor. There was a moat on the outside of the wall, but it was shallow, and the man stood there waiting for the other two. Powers quickly followed, and the three scrambled across the moat to the dry land on the other side. The alarm had now been given throughout that section of the city. Drums were beating. They could hear words of command. Lights appeared through the misty darkness on the ramparts.

The three stood still for a moment, not knowing just what to do. As they did so a sharp call rang out, followed by the sound of a volley. In their excitement the soldiers did not realize that it was simply three prisoners escaping, but thought it was an assault by the whole American army, which, although Denton and his comrades did not know it, was already fighting hard while approaching the city from the south. In their confusion the men began firing volleys from the walls, blazing away at random in the darkness in every direction.

The bullets spattered around the three men like rain. They needed no other incentive, and turned instantly away from the wall and ran hastily on.

CHAPTER XVIII

RIDING DOWN THE CAVALRY

It has been remarked that sailors are not good marchers, therefore they should be worse runners, but our friends showed themselves capable of an astonishing burst of speed. They maintained their rapid pace with tireless enthusiasm for some time. It was so dark and misty that they had no idea where they were, or where they were going, except that they could tell from the diminishing noise of the shots and cries behind them that they were leaving the vicinity of the walls. That was the first and most important thing to do anyway.

The country, after they had gone a short distance, they found was marshy and soft from the rains. There they went slower ; in fact, they floundered terribly in the mud. Fortunately, although it seemed disastrous at the time, they did not strike a causeway, or road, until they had gone perhaps a mile or so from the place of escape.

"Well," panted old Ben as they finally crawled out of a muck hole onto one of the dry roads of the region, "I never did think in my hull life that I'd be so glad of the feel of dry land agin !

Water wus the thing I most allus wanted. That is, as a pint of rest, as it wus, but I sartainly hev had enough of water fer a spell. Fust that scuttle butt under the port, then that ditch under the wall, an' then a puddle every ten fathoms fer the last half hour! Splice my clew garnets, but I feel as if I'd been rolled in the lee scuppers on a wet ship—an' a dirty ship at that! There ain't a clean rag, or a dry one, on me! Souse me, but I believe I hates fresh water as much I do the land! Don't ye agree with me, Sam Powers?"

"Umph," grunted Powers.

"Ye see, sir, Sam Powers he agrees with me as usual."

"What's to be done now?" asked Denton, smiling faintly at the old man's remark.

He had not recovered wind enough himself to do much talking then, and he leaned against the low wall that bordered the roadway for a few moments' rest.

"Well, sir," said the old man again, "arter we gits our breathers a-workin' easy, I thinks we'd better leg it down the road. It's dark yet. I wonder wot time it is? Dog-gone sech a kentry 'thout bells to tell the watches nohow."

"It ought to be about four o'clock, I think," answered the midshipman, "it is just beginning to dawn over yonder. You know day breaks quickly down here in August. I wonder what day it is?"

"Can't tell," growled the boatswain's mate; we've

lost all count of days an' watches an' everythin'. But I really thinks, sir, we'd better git underway."

"Heave ahead, then," said Denton, rising from the wall, and the three started down the road again.

"I wish we had some weepins," said old Ben, at last; "ef I could only feel a cutlass."

"Yes," said Ned, "but we haven't. I think we better keep on the road as long as it is dark. Perhaps when it gets lighter we'll get to some woods or something. Meanwhile let's dash ahead. I wish we had some horses."

"Yes," said the sailor, "they mought git us over the ground a leetle quicker like, but that's about the only 'vantage of 'em I sees."

"Wouldn't you rather get on a horse than stay in prison?" asked Ned.

"Good Lord, yes!" said Ben. "I'd ruther ride down a jackstay fer a watch—anythin' than that. An' Sam Powers agrees with me, don't ye, Powers?"

They could not tell what was before them, but with the carelessness of sailors and the thoughtlessness of youth they considered that their dangers were practically over. Really they were only beginning. They had progressed several miles at a rapid pace and were somewhat tired when day broke fully. It was still misty, but as the sun came out they discovered where they were. Fortune had led their steps to the road over which they had

entered the city, and they recognized that fact with joy.

Far behind them rose the castle of Chapultepec. Back of them lay the City of Mexico. In front of them was a small town. Denton remembered that it was the place called Churubusco. There was a thick wood off to the right of the road which extended to the southward far beyond the limits of the town before them. The place, only a quarter of a mile away, appeared to be full of soldiers and heavily fortified, so far as they could see from where they stood.

It also happened that the road where they were was deserted at that hour of the morning. Back of them, however, perhaps half a mile away, came a body of soldiery. The rising sun glimmered on their accoutrements through the mist. The appearance of the three prisoners seemed to attract no especial attention from the approaching troops or the garrison of the town. Indeed, they looked very much like the ordinary peasantry of the country, so far as their clothing was concerned, for the uniforms they had on when they were captured had been worn or torn to pieces, and they had been supplied with anything that pleased the fancy of their captors.

The Americans had to do something, and do it instantly. They could not go forward through the town, they would not go back toward the city. What to do was obvious.

"We must take to the woods," said Denton, turn-

ing to the right and plunging into the forest. "If what has been said is true, our army is to the south of that village. If we can once get around it, we may get beyond the Mexican lines and perhaps will be safe."

"Right ye are, sir!" answered Griffin, and the two seamen followed the young man under the trees.

Their progress here was not so rapid as it had been formerly; the grove was thickly overgrown with undergrowth — chaparral, it was called — through which they could only force themselves with difficulty. Fortunately they met no one, and after a tiresome march of several hours, during which they were compelled to ford the Churubusco Creek, they succeeded in passing around the town.

During this passage through the woods Denton, with an idea that it was his duty to find out all he could of the Mexican defences, had made a detour of the edge of the chaparral overlooking the town. There was the bridge across the creek, which was defended by the heavy work called a tête-du-pont. It appeared to have been strengthened since they had passed it on the way to Mexico. Off to the right of this and nearer to Denton was an old convent, which was also heavily fortified. There were earthworks and light intrenchments in every direction. The road led across the bridge and straight to the southward as far as he could see.

The boy fixed the positions in his mind and re-

joined his companions, who had taken advantage of the brief halt to enjoy a rest. Then they pushed on until they reached the edge of the wood where it touched the road again. Below them were cultivated fields of every description. They might have fared better in that direction by plodding on through the thick growth over the soft, muddy ground, but they were tired and the prospect was most uninviting. Besides, they fancied they had passed the main Mexican lines and were now on neutral ground between the two armies. After a brief consultation Denton led the two seamen out on the road. They were far enough away from Churubusco not to excite attention, and with hearts lighter than ever they tramped merrily along.

"I tell you wot it is, sir," said Ben, "if I could hear a bo's'n's mate a-pipin' the watch ter breakfast, if it wus my watch I mean, it would be a mighty welcome sound."

"Yes it would," said Denton. "I'm almost famished."

"They didn't give us any too much nohow, in that pris'n, an' wot it wus wusn't fust class, but it seems mighty good now. As fer me I could almost eat a human bein' I'm that starved," growled Ben, savagely. "W'y, they didn't even give us a chaw of tobaker. I mought git along faster, but this empty hold bissness don't help me none. 'Taint proper fer a ship, or a sailorman, to be a-flyin' light with nuthin' under hatches. An' I ain't even got a belt so that I

can take a reef in it to make me feel full. Sam Powers agrees with me, don't ye, Powers?"

"Umph!" said Powers.

"We've got to git somethin' to eat, that's all there is about it," continued Ben.

"I think we'll soon be in the American lines, and then we can get everything we need," said Denton, encouragingly. "Shake out another reef in your tops'ls, and heave ahead, Ben—— Hark! What's that?" he exclaimed, suddenly.

A deep boom coming faintly through the air of the morning broke on their ears.

"A heavy gun!" cried Powers.

"Agin ye speaks, Sam Powers, an' to the pint," said Ben, "w'ich I marvels at the way you conceals your abilities ord'nar'ly."

"There it goes again," said Denton, "it sounds like a frigate's heavy battery."

"Yes," answered the boatswain's mate, "it's a battle. I kin almost hear the crackin' of the small arms. I wonder wot's up? They must be fightin' down there."

"If that's so then we're behind the Mexican lines. What's that?"

The road made a slight turn before them, and as they rounded it in front of them rose a low stone house by the wall, before which three horses were tied. A little distance away a soldier kept watch.

"I'm afraid we're trapped," said Denton, anxiously.

"Not yet, sir," said Powers; "we'll take the soldier and seize the horses."

"Lord, Sam Powers," gasped Ben, "wot a head you've got! If ye wus as good a talker as me you might be a admiral."

"That's a good plan," said Denton. "We'll walk boldly up to him; he'll think we're Spaniards. I will speak to him; and then you and Griffin grab him. Then we'll make a run for the horses, and break away for the south."

"Right, oh, Master Ned!" said the old man.

The three Americans walked up to the unsuspecting soldier, who challenged them carelessly enough. What had he to apprehend from these countrymen? Several miles back of the main line of the Mexican army, with soldiers all around him, he felt entirely secure. Ned's answer that they were volunteers going to the front to join the army reassured him. He brought his piece to a carry and signed to them to pass. Instead of doing this the three seamen sprang upon him. Griffin clasped his hand over his mouth, while Powers gripped him in his strong arms. He was helpless.

"Shall I kill him?" asked Powers.

"No, certainly not," said Ned, with a shudder. "Strap him and gag him."

Griffin reached down and tore off a large piece of his frayed and dirty trouser leg, which he coolly jammed into the man's mouth. The two men then undid the soldier's cross belts, strapped his hands

and feet together with them, and laid him gently on the ground by the side of the road.

"We're losin' waluable time," growled Ben.

"Can't help it," answered Ned. "I don't want to kill him in cold blood, and have another man's death on my hands. Now, let's go for the horses."

They walked softly down to where the horses were. To untie them was the work of a minute. Denton scrambled to his easily enough, and Griffin was able, as he said, to lay his aboard, but Powers, fortunately, had not mounted when one of the officers to whom the horses belonged came to the door. He uttered a cry of surprise, and then went down from a blow from the seaman's fist. The next minute, with astonishing agility, considering the strangeness of the effort, Powers jumped to the back of his horse, and the three galloped madly down the road.

The horses were handsome, spirited animals, and soon realized that none of the three were experienced riders, whereupon they immediately took things into their own hands, and proceeded to run away. They kept together fairly well for a short time, although Denton's horse, carrying less weight, soon began to forge ahead.

"Blast my eyes!" yelled Griffin at last, "this yer animal is a-runnin' wild! He don't answer to his hellum! Dash him, w'y, he's runnin' away!"

"Let him run, Ben," laughed Denton, "he can't do any harm, and he'll get tired after awhile. They'll run themselves out."

Before they ran themselves out, however, something was yet to happen. Up the road came a squadron of cavalry. At their head rode an officer followed by a brilliant staff. They completely filled the road. The horses of the Americans were now entirely unmanageable. There was nothing they could do but keep on. And to keep straight on was the best thing to do, after all!

"Men," cried Denton, looking back at the other two close behind, "it's all up with us, I fear."

"Not much it ain't," answered Ben; "if I can't stop this brute they can't. We'll jest ride through 'em, sir."

"We'll have to," answered Denton.

Their approach had been observed by the officers, and many voices were raised ordering them to halt. They could not if they would, and now they didn't even wish to. The spirit of the furious gallop had entered into the boy and he began to enjoy it hugely. He raised his head, therefore, and shouted something. In the confusion those in front of him did not understand. It made no difference. The next moment the three Americans were in the midst of the soldiers. They burst upon the astonished Mexicans like a storm. Two or three who attempted to bar their passage were knocked down, and the three Americans actually drove through the squadron of cavalry in safety without being stopped!

Griffin and Powers were fairly lying flat on the backs of their horses, clinging to their necks like

grim death. Such a volley of oaths and execrations in Spanish as were hurled upon them as they passed can scarcely be imagined. The squadron was completely disorganized and thrown into confusion by the bold dash. One or two men had been seriously hurt. The officer with the brilliant staff, infuriated beyond measure, turned and rode back through the squadron, which, after order was restored, followed him at a gallop in the direction taken by the flying three.

"That was glorious!" cried Denton, exultantly, to the other two. "Three cheers for the American flag! We can ride down the whole Mexican army!"

"We kin!" answered Griffin. "An' scuttle me, sir, we'll hev a chance to do it, too. Look yonder!"

CHAPTER XIX

HARD FIGHTING ON THE ROAD

A LARGE body of foot soldiers, two or three regiments perhaps, went marching slowly down the road away from them. They were re-enforcements for the Mexican army engaged that morning, although they did not seem in a hurry to get to the front. Far to the southward the roaring of the cannon, which had grown in intensity as they approached nearer, told everybody that the fighting was still going on.

"We can't get through that crowd," said Griffin, promptly. "Let's try to heave to, sir."

"Haul away on your lee braces and turn their heads around. Slack off to windward, men!" called Denton, pulling away at the right-hand bridle rein.

The horses were pretty well blown by this time, and the riders managed to turn them into the side of the road, where they finally succeeded in stopping them.

"There's a house yonder. Let's go there," cried the boy, pointing ahead. "There's no other place to hide. We can't do anything else."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Griffin, staring toward the building.

"We kin fight from there, sir," exclaimed Powers —that man was always anxious to fight!

The three slipped from their horses, and at the suggestion of the boatswain's mate, taking the sabres which were strapped to the saddles and the revolvers they found in the holsters, they turned and ran swiftly toward the house. It was a low, square building, with a door opening on the road and without any windows on that side. It was only one story high, with the usual flat roof.

As the midshipman entered the door four or five soldiers, who were seated at a table playing cards, rose to their feet in alarm. Without waiting for orders, Griffin and Powers blazed away at them. One man was shot dead, another wounded, and the others ran for the door at the other side of the room, which extended clear through the house.

Their arms were left on the table. To shut the heavy oaken doors at the back and front of the house and to barricade them with the furniture was the work of a few moments. The house, it appeared, had been deserted by its inhabitants and had been occupied by the soldiers. After the three Americans had made everything secure and looked to the wounded Mexican as well as they could, they took the arms up to the flat roof, which was bordered by a low brick parapet. Leaving Griffin and Powers to keep watch there, Denton went below to forage. He found some tortillas and a jar of water, which he took to his faithful sailors.

It was nine o'clock in the morning by this time, and the boy thought he had never been so hungry in his life. The meal they made on the roof of the house was a most refreshing one, and they enjoyed it to the very limit. They ate the last crumb and wished for more. By the time they had finished the officer whose escort they had ridden down arrived opposite the house. The tired horses standing outside instantly revealed the presence of the three Americans whom he had pursued.

He rode fearlessly forward to reconnoitre, followed by his staff. When he got within range he was greeted by three shots from the parapet. Two of his men fell to the ground and a bullet whistled past his shoulder. He prudently moved out of range at once. There was a hurried consultation and then he detached a staff officer and sent him down the road past the house after the troops marching to the front. The Americans gave him a volley as he raced by them, but did not hit him. The officer had not gone far when he met the brigade of infantry, this time coming back up the road at a double quick. The ranks were opened at his order, the men were halted, and two six-pound guns galloped to the front. To unlimber them and throw them in battery was the work of a minute. The guns were trained on the house door. The officer of the horsemen now took a white handkerchief out of his pocket, and waving it over his head, came toward the house.

"By George!" exclaimed Denton, as the man drew near. "If that isn't our old friend, Colonel Almonte! God help us if we get into his hands. What do you want?" he cried, showing himself above the parapet as Almonte waved the handkerchief.

"You see," said the Mexican, "that you are outnumbered and surrounded. I don't know who you are."

"You don't, eh?" asked Denton. "Well, I'm Midshipman Denton of the United States frigate *Mississippi* with a detachment of men from that ship and we are holding this house. You know me now?"

"Perfectly, my young cockerel," roared the Mexican in rage. "I almost hanged you once, this time you shall surely die."

"You'll have to catch us before you do that, señor," cried Denton, laughing defiantly, although how he expected to make good his words he could not tell.

With a smile of disdain Almonte turned and rode out of range. Instantly the six-pounders began playing on the house. The door was battered down in four shots. While the firing was going on, another cannon galloped across the field and opened on the rear door. The Americans could only remain passive on the flat roof, for the Mexicans were still out of musket range. When the barricade had been utterly demolished by the guns and the house

partially wrecked, the soldiers made a rush to carry it by storm. They came forward, cheering.

The three Americans behind the parapet, firing slowly, poured bullet after bullet into the mass at close range. In their excitement they finally rose to their feet, while the rest of the brigade, which had moved nearer, rained a perfect storm of bullets upon them. One grazed Denton's arm, two or three pierced his clothing, one cut across the cheek of Griffin, and one struck Powers in the left shoulder, inflicting a painful wound. The only ammunition the Americans had was that in the half a dozen muskets they had captured and the charges left in the revolvers they had taken. As soon as they expended them they were at the mercy of the Mexicans. That time came with startling swiftness.

The soldiery, receiving no answer to their fire, filled the house and made for the roof. Yelling like fiends, Griffin and Powers, in spite of his wound, and the midshipman ranged themselves about the narrow opening, endeavoring with their sabres to cut down the men as they ascended. The trap-door was battered off by musket-balls, and although they drove down the first who tried to clamber up, such a storm of bullets was poured through the opening that the Americans were driven back. In the smoke the Mexican leaders effected a lodgement on the roof and the men began to swarm after. There was a fearful mêlée on the roof before the Amer-

icans were overborne, and hurled down with a dozen soldiers trying to get at each one.

Meanwhile something was happening in the road. The major portion of the brigade, which had not been engaged at the house, seemed to be held in position only by the most vigorous efforts of its officers. The road suddenly appeared to be full of fugitives. A half dozen riderless horses came bursting through the ranks, throwing them into confusion. Four horses attached to a caisson without a driver followed. Men frightened to death, and shouting that they had been annihilated by the Americans and that everybody must save themselves, soon appeared on the road. Some of them were wounded. Most of them had thrown away their arms. The place was full of them. A squadron of cavalry dashed frantically up.

Seeing that the capture of the house had been effected, Almonte with his troopers rode rapidly to the southward to get to the rear of the brigade. The officers endeavored to face the men about and march them back toward the sound of the battle, but the soldiers had become filled with inexplicable fear and would not obey. Suddenly the fear became a panic. The whole mass turned and ran up the road in terrible confusion, sweeping their officers before them. The men were screaming and yelling like mad, trampling upon one another in their fear without mercy. Almonte, vainly protesting, was energetically endeavoring to check the panic, but he was

swept away with the rest. In the midst of the fighting on the roof some of the Mexicans became aware of the commotion in the road. One of them ran to the parapet and peered down at his frightened comrades.

"The Americanos!" they cried, "are upon us! Fly for your lives!"

He sprang over the parapet as he spoke. Incredible as it seems, the men on the roof instantly released the sailors, and dropping over the parapet joined the rout. The Americans could hardly believe their senses. A moment before a dozen men had been swarming over each of them, their captors had been literally piled upon them, now they were alone. What had happened?

Leaving Powers, whose wound had bled considerably, Denton and Griffin ran to the edge of the parapet and looked down the road. The brigade had vanished, but the road was still filled with flying men. Nobody looked up to the roof or paid any attention to the sailors; they were too frightened as they shouted to one another to hasten along, as the dreaded Americanos were coming and would soon be upon them. They were too occupied in securing their own safety to do anything more. Presently a group of officers, brilliantly uniformed, came galloping rapidly down the road, smashing through the panic-stricken soldiers, guns, wagons, and other débris of a routed army which encumbered it.

At their head rode a tall, swarthy man, with an air

of command about him, whose stern countenance was sufficiently expressive of wrath and dismay. The midshipman noticed that he had a wooden leg, although, in spite of this disability, he rode with the ease and grace of an accomplished horseman. The splendor of his uniform, and the fact that he rode ahead of the others and alone, indicated that he was a person of high consideration.

As they drew near, Denton recognized General Santa Anna. He had been an exile at Havana when the war broke out. He had been brought thence and had been landed at Vera Cruz by an American ship in the hope that he might put an end to the war, but he had patriotically put himself at the head of the army, had been made President, and had done his best to oppose the American advance on his country. His orders and dispositions had not been carried out by General Valencia, who had been badly beaten, with the loss of almost his entire force, at Contreras, amid the volcanic rocks of El Pedregal, that very morning, which happened to be August 20, 1847. The rocks had not proven impassable to the American soldiers after all!

After the unexpected defeat of Valencia, the Mexicans under Santa Anna had been thrown into confusion by the mad rush of the fugitives, and now the whole army was retreating—if such a mad dash for safety could be called a retreat—on the fortifications at Churubusco. Santa Anna had done all he could to stop the panic, and, failing that, was

returning to Churubusco, upon which place he hoped to rally his disorganized force.

As he swept by, moved by an instinct of boyish bravado, for which he nearly paid dear, Denton, who had been on the ship which had brought Santa Anna to Vera Cruz, and therefore knew him, called him by name. For a moment the general checked his horse.

"Hello, general!" cried the boy, mockingly. "Where are you going in such a hurry, sir? The Americans are not down there," pointing toward Churubusco. "They are back that way. Hurrah for the United States!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" yelled old Ben, who had entered into the spirit of the conversation with a recklessness worthy of his officer.

"Shoot those fools!" shouted Santa Anna, spurring his horse on.

The pistols of his escort were out, and Denton's career would have been ended then and there, for the soldiers were not ten feet away, had not old Ben dragged him down to the roof just as they fired and held him there in spite of his struggles.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the old man, tightly clasping the boy in his arms, "we better lay low till they gits away. They're too bad skeered to stay here long. I never thunk I'd hev to throw you down like this, but we sartainly let the American eagle scream."

"Yes, didn't we!" laughed Denton.

"I wish I could a-seen it," said Powers. He was suffering much pain from his wound, but he did not talk any more now than he had done before.

"I reckon we'd better stay here for a while," said Ben, and as the advice was good, they lay concealed for perhaps half an hour. By that time, however, curiosity got the better of them. The road seemed very quiet. No one seemed to be passing.

"I'm going to take a look," said Denton, scrambling up, followed by Griffin.

"There's more of 'em comin' down there, sir—more horses," said Ben, pointing to a cloud of dust. "Better lay down, sir."

"Yes," said the boy, "but we're safe enough yet. I'll wait a moment. Ben!" he shouted in glee, at last, "I believe those men are Americans!"

"Wot d'ye say, sir?"

"Aren't those uniforms blue?"

"They is."

"Thank God!" cried Denton. "They are United States soldiers! Powers, we're safe!"

The dragoons were coming up rapidly. At their head rode an officer. Although he was on horseback they could tell from his uniform that he was an infantryman. He had no command over them, for there were other officers there, but, nevertheless, he rode at the head of the pursuit. He was a mounted officer, the quartermaster of his regiment, they afterward learned, and having nothing particu-

"Hurrah for the United States!"

lar to do that morning he had ridden forward to see what he could of the fight, and had naturally got into the front rank of the cavalry.

He was a small man, smooth shaven, with a keen, steady eye, and a square jaw; a young man, too. His glance fell upon the boy and the seaman on the roof. They were both yelling joyously and waving their hands frantically. They were so excited and the dragoons made so much noise on the road that they could not be understood. The infantry officer, however, turned to the dragoon officer, and exclaimed:

"Why, they aren't Mexicans! That boy looks like an American, and the man, too."

He reined in his horse and rode nearer to the house, while the rest of the dragoons rode on after the Mexicans.

"Who are you?" he cried.

"I am Midshipman Denton, of the United States frigate *Mississippi*," answered the boy.

"Oh, we've heard about you. Then you escaped?"

"Yes, we have. Who are you?"

"I am Lieutenant Ulysses S. Grant, of the Fourth Infantry. Are all the Mexicans gone?"

"Every one. Will it be safe for us——?"

"Quite safe," answered the lieutenant. "You will find General Scott's headquarters down the road. There's another naval officer there named Semmes. He came to negotiate about you."

"Did you wipe out the Mexicans?"

"Cleaned them out, body, soul, and breeches. Didn't you see them run?"

"I should say so!"

At this juncture a staff officer came dashing up the road at a rapid gallop, until he overtook the dragoons and halted them.

"The pursuit is stopped evidently," said Lieutenant Grant, "but there will certainly be more fighting. The army will try to carry the position beyond there, I am sure, so that if you want to be in it you ought to repair to headquarters at once."

"I think I can give some information about the Mexican defences," said Denton. "Here, Griffin, give me a lift over the wall."

"What about Powers?" asked Griffin.

"Who's that?" asked Grant.

"It's a wounded sailor, sir," returned the boy.

"Leave him there with your friend to watch him and then you can notify the hospital at headquarters."

"Mr. Denton, are you goin' into a scrimmage without me?" cried Ben, in alarm.

"I'll be back later and pick you up. Wait here for me; take care of Powers; you are safe now."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You say you have information about the defences?" asked Grant, again.

"Yes, I passed by them this morning and saw them quite plainly."

"Captain Lee!" called the young officer instantly, as the staff officer who had passed came trotting back followed by two or three aides and the dragoons.

"What is it, Mr. Grant?" said the officer who had been hailed, checking his horse.

"Information about the defences, captain."

At this instant the captain turned his horse and rode over to Grant. As he approached, Denton thought he had never seen a handsomer man. So far as outward appearance goes there was something a thousand times more striking than in that of Lieutenant Grant, but, there was something about the latter that was most impressive, too. Both officers were accomplished horsemen. Captain Lee rode his horse with the grace of a Southern cavalier; Lieutenant Grant rode his with the mastery of one of Cromwell's Ironsides.

"Who is this?" asked the captain.

"Midshipman Denton, sir," answered Grant. "Mr. Denton, this is Captain Robert E. Lee, of the Engineers."

"Oh, we have heard of you," said Captain Lee. "You have escaped, I am glad to see."

"Yes, sir."

"What do you know about the Mexican defences?"

"I saw them all plainly at Churubusco this morning."

"Can you ride a horse?"

"Not very well, but I can manage to stick on," said Denton, smiling.

"That will do. Give him a horse, someone."

"Do you know where my regiment is, captain?" asked Lieutenant Grant, as the boy mounted the horse offered him by one of the escort.

"It's coming up the road. If you wait it will be along in a short time. You are always ahead of it, I see. Now, Mr. Denton, General Scott will be delighted to have your information. I was just going toward Churubusco myself to reconnoitre, but you can tell him more than I can find out. We shall attack immediately, Mr. Grant."

"I suppose so."

"I shall be glad to be of service," answered Denton as they turned away.

CHAPTER XX

OLD FUSS AND FEATHERS

Captain Lee led the way at a spanking gallop down the road. By dint of much practice, in a short time the midshipman had acquired some sort of a knack at horsemanship, although he rode awkwardly enough. The captain, observing this, ventured to give the youngster some advice as how to sit his saddle so as to spare both himself and horse. It was astonishing how the skilful direction assisted him. He had no great length of time, however, to put the instructions in practice, for they had not gone very far before they came upon a body of horsemen trotting slowly up the road.

At the head, upon a large, powerful black horse, rode a very tall, stout, imposing-looking old man. His hair was gray and he appeared to be well on in years, being, in fact, just past sixty-one at the time. He wore the full-dress uniform of a major-general in the United States army. None of the trappings of his rank were missing, not even the cocked hat and feather. Although he was in the midst of an arduous campaign in the heart of the enemy's country, and in actual command of a great battle, one detail of which had just been brilliantly and successfully

completed at Contreras, yet he was as spick and span, as fine and fit, as if he were about to enter a ball-room. He looked every inch a commander and an autocrat.

He took himself very seriously, did General Scott, but then he had a right to, for he had a record for gallantry and for successful fighting back of him, in the War of 1812, which entitled him to every consideration. So far, also, his manœuvres in the present campaign had been in accordance with a faultless strategy and brilliant tactical dispositions. He had fought two remarkable battles, besides capturing Vera Cruz, and conducted a march which for boldness in conception and skill in execution was difficult to parallel. He was a thorough soldier, a master of the profession of which he had made an exhaustive study. He was also a brilliantly educated and highly cultivated gentleman.

With all this he was something of a martinet, a great stickler for military observances, keen to demand the deference to which he was entitled, stilted, formal, and precise to a painful degree. Contrary to General Taylor, who cared nothing whatever about forms and ceremonies, whose slackness in such matters was so apparent that the soldiers called him "Old Rough and Ready," Scott was so punctilious and pompous that he was known as "Old Fuss and Feathers." The Mexicans did not think of him that way though. If they had expressed it they might have called him "Old Fire and Sword."

As General Scott saw his chief engineer and the midshipman approach he checked his horse. Captain Lee stopped in front of him and saluted. He had been long enough on the old general's staff to know that he could with safety omit no formality whatsoever, even though the army might be in imminent danger of attack—which it was not, in this instance, by the way.

"Captain Lee," said Scott.

"General Scott."

"Whom have you here, sir?"

"Midshipman Denton of the *Mississippi*, sir," answered Lee.

"Ah! Come forward, Mr. Denton. How came you here, sir?"

"With two companions, seamen, sir, I escaped from the City of Mexico early this morning."

"I congratulate you, young man. Captain Semmes," he continued, turning his head.

At the signal the former captain of the *Somers* spurred to the front and saluted.

"You will rejoice to see your young friend here safe and sound," said General Scott, indicating Denton with a magnificent gesture.

They used to say that General Scott could give Addison and Dr. Johnson cards and spades in style and address, and still win out!

"Indeed, yes," said Semmes, riding nearer the boy and grasping his hand. "I never was so pleased in my life. Who is with you, Denton?"

"Griffin and Powers, sir," answered Ned, in great delight.

"Are they well?"

"Powers is wounded, not seriously. Griffin is all right."

"Where are they?"

"Back in a deserted house up the road."

"And the marines?"

"All killed, sir."

"Poor fellows!"

"May I suggest, Captain Semmes," said Scott pompously, "that you defer further interrogations until a more propitious hour?"

"Certainly, sir," said Semmes, somewhat abashed before the Olympian majesty of the general.

"Captain Lee," said Scott, turning to the engineer, "you surely have not had time to reconnoitre the position of the enemy as I directed?"

There was just a shade of reproof in the general's voice. Lee, however, answered promptly.

"No, sir. Mr. Denton, who was rescued by Lieutenant Grant of the Fourth Infantry, informed me through him that he had examined the defences of Churubusco and knew all about them. I thought it would save time to bring him to you at once, sir."

"You have done well," returned Scott. "Now, Mr. Denton, your story."

"When we broke out of prison this morning, General," said the boy, "we ran down the road, which happened to lead through Churubusco. I

remembered the village because we had been marched through it when we went up to the capital, sir."

"Did you come back through it this morning?"

"No, sir. We tacked ship——"

"How, sir? Tacked ship?"

"That is, we ran off to leeward, sir, and fetched a compass round her——"

"Ah, you flanked the position! Is that it?"

"Yes, sir. I took occasion, however, to beat up to windward to take a look at——"

"Really, Mr. Denton, I would suggest that you confine your remarks to military terms while you are on shore, sir."

"Ay, ay, sir, so far as I know I shall. Well, sir, I went through the wood till I reached the edge of the village, and from a little hill I could overlook the whole thing."

"What did you see?"

"The enemy seemed to be posted around two centres, sir. The first, which was nearest to me, is a large building with a low stone wall around it and an earthwork around that. That's to the west, on a crossroad leading to a little village, which we also avoided."

"That will be Coyhoacan, general," said Lee, respectfully.

"Yes, certainly."

"The building inside the works," continued Denton, as the general signed to him to go on, "appears

to be a church, and the whole place was full of men. There were lines of earthworks from the church to the bridge over the Churubusco River. The bridge is fortified. There was a battery of six cannon there this morning and the place is also filled with men, who are extended behind earthworks on either side of the road for some distance."

"Ah, a tête-du-pont," exclaimed the general. "Does this agree with your information, Captain Lee?"

"Entirely, sir, and with your permission I wish to compliment this young officer on the accuracy of his remarks. The church is undoubtedly San Pablo, sir."

"He has done well. Very well, sir," answered Scott, gravely. "I think we have the situation clearly before us. One more question, Mr. Denton," he continued.

The general was losing some of his impressive solemnity as he gathered the threads of the possible action in his hand and began to think of the fighting.

"You say you came around Churubusco and Coyhoacan?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know the way back? Could you find it?"

"Perfectly, sir. Yes, sir."

"Is it practicable for troops?"

"It isn't an open road, sir, but I think men

could get through, with some difficulty. We did it."

"Mr. Denton, you are not under my command, yet I assume to avail myself of your services as belonging to the sister branch of the navy, sir."

"Yes, sir. Anything, sir. I am glad to be of assistance, sir."

"You have been in the saddle or on foot all day. It is now approaching noon. You must be tired and hungry."

"I'm fit for anything, sir, if there is to be any fighting," said the boy, impetuously.

The general smiled.

"Very well. A very proper spirit for a young officer. Captain Lee, you will direct General Shields to march around Coyhoacan and Churubusco and take the enemy in the rear. Mr. Denton will guide you. Let him take his own brigade and General Pierce's also. You will go yourself with his division. Lieutenant McClellan!"

"Sir," said the little officer, riding up and saluting, at the same time smiling cordially at Denton.

"You will direct General Worth to advance along the main road and attack the tête-du-pont. Colonel Garland's brigade will lead. Generals Twiggs and Pillow!"

"Sir," answered the two division commanders, saluting. They happened to be with headquarters at that moment.

"Your divisions will march up the Coyhoacan

road to the right after you reach the village and fall upon the church. Captain Beauregard!"

"Sir."

"Ride back to General Quitman, and tell him that I have detached General Shields and one of his brigades for an attack on the rear of the enemy, and bid him make his dispositions to hold our base of supplies at San Augustin with his other brigades without fail."

"Beg pardon, general," said a staff officer, approaching and saluting. "Garland's, Riley's, and Smith's brigades are close at hand."

"Let us draw aside, gentlemen," said Scott, turning to one side of the causeway, "to afford them passage."

As soon as the road was clear the American soldiers, flushed with their tremendous victory of the morning, came riding up. At their head rode General Worth. McClellan had just reached him, but before he could deliver the order the veteran turned and faced Scott.

"What are our orders, General Scott?" he asked, saluting.

"Straight ahead, sir," said Scott, raising his voice so that all the soldiers could hear all he said; "you have done nobly this morning. I wish you to do better this afternoon. I look to you and your gallant men to carry the tête-du-pont over the Churubusco."

"We shall do it, sir," answered Worth, his fine

old face alight with enthusiasm. "Three cheers for General Winfield Scott!" he called, lifting his chapeau.

The cheers were given with a will.

"They ought to be up by one o'clock. In fact, the battle should be joined everywhere. Captain Lee, you may carry out your orders. You will find Shields's command in the rear, I think. Now, gentlemen, to your positions," said Scott.

"Come, Mr. Denton," said Lee, saluting and galloping down the road.

Scott, with his staff, slowly moved off in the direction of Churubusco, taking position where he could easily be found by officers from any of the various divisions, and at the same time be in position personally to direct the fighting in any emergency. The battle of Churubusco resolved itself into three distinct movements. A direct attack up the main road upon the tête-du-pont on the right of the village; a simultaneous attack up another causeway that diverged from the main road at the village of San Antonio, out of which Clark's brigade had already flanked the Mexicans, and which curved in toward the heavily fortified and formidable stone church on the left of Churubusco; and a third attack, which was to be delivered by Shields's division as soon as they turned the right flank of the Mexican defences and got in the rear of the Mexican lines. In the nature of things, the first two attacks were commenced some time before the turning

movement by Shields had been completed, but they all took place near together.

As Lee and his young companion rode down the causeway at a terrific pace, for Scott had enjoined speed upon them, Denton found opportunity to ask where the marines of the army were.

"They are back with General Quitman's division guarding the depot at San Augustin."

"They are not apt to see any fighting, then?"

"Not to-day. Nothing, that is, except skirmishes with prowling cavalry or guerillas. We have cleaned out everything to the south of here."

"That will break Bailey's heart. He is a lieutenant in the battalion and is a great friend of mine."

"I see," returned Lee, smiling. "I have no doubt he will get plenty of fighting before we gain possession of the City of Mexico. Meanwhile, we shall have plenty of it, at any rate."

"I'm glad of it," said Denton. "I was treated so horribly by those Mexicans that I'd just like to get at them."

"You must tell me about your escape when opportunity serves."

"I shall, sir. By the way, I left my man at that house, and he will be terribly disappointed if he doesn't get a chance to get in the fighting."

"We'll pick him up on the way back. There, if I mistake not, is General Shields's brigade."

A nearer approach proved the correctness of Captain Lee's surmise.

"General Shields," he cried, saluting.

"Captain Lee," answered the officer, in a rich and delightfully Irish voice.

"This is Midshipman Denton, sir, of the *Mississippi*. He escaped from the City of Mexico this morning."

"Indeed, and it's a lucky b'y you are," said the general, shaking the boy's hand. "And it's meself that's glad to see your young face."

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir," stammered Ned, embarrassed as much by this general's cordiality as he had been by Scott's formality.

"Mr. Denton has turned the right flank of the enemy at Churubusco. He offers to lead you around that flank by the same pathway."

"True for you," cried Shields, with an Irishman's delight at a possible battle showing in his voice.

"General Scott's plan is for General Worth to take the tête-du-pont on the main road, while Generals Twiggs and Pillow will attack the fortified church on the left. You are to pass around the right flank and fall upon the rear. General Pierce's brigade is attached to your force, and you will command the division, sir."

"I wish we had a chance in the main attack," said Shields, regretfully. "I'm afraid this manœuvre of ours means nothing but marching."

"I think you'll have all the fighting you want, General Shields," said Lee, smiling. "Santa Anna

is too good a soldier not to have massed troops in the rear of Churubusco."

"There will be plenty of men there," said Denton, respectfully. "I saw a lot of them as we came down the road."

"Good!" said Shields.

With a word or two of command to his staff officers, with which they sped down the lines of the brigade, and a message to General Pierce, whose brigade happened to be close at hand, the division so formed, which had been resting quietly at ease, immediately came to attention and took up the march.

CHAPTER XXI

WITH SHIELDS AT CHURUBUSCO

It was noon when the head of the column reached the house made memorable by the defence of the three sailors. Securing permission from General Shields, Denton, accompanied by Captain Lee, who had a curiosity to investigate the place, dismounted from his horse, which, by the way, he was glad enough to do, and ran through the deserted room to the stairs which led to the roof.

There, on the top of it, calmly reposing on the hard bricks, his head covered by a Mexican sombrero, which he had picked up, lay Master Ben Griffin, chief boatswain's mate of the *Mississippi*, soundly sleeping. Powers was nowhere to be seen.

"That's a sample," chuckled Captain Lee, "of the calm confidence and reckless assurance of the American sailor. This road is full of troops of all kinds, and he has deliberately laid down and gone to sleep."

"Ahoy, Griffin!" cried Denton, mimicking the old sailor's manner. "A-all the starboard watch, my hearties! Show a leg! Tumble up there!"

At the sound of the midshipman's voice the sailor

sprang to his feet. He rubbed his eyes for a moment and gazed stupidly at the two officers.

"W'y, Master Ned—w'ich I begs yer pardon, Mr. Denton," he exclaimed, starting forward, "may I be jiggered if I didn't think I wus on the old *Mississippi* bein' called fer the midwatch fer the minute. Ay, ay, sir; bein' alone here an' havin' nobody to bother me, an' havin' et and drunk up all I could find in this house, w'ich it wusn't much, I jest laid down to sleep waitin' fer you, bein' as ye said you'd call me."

"Where's Powers?"

"Oh, he was took away by some horspital men to the sick bay. That there soger man you wus talkin' to, you know, sir, he sent 'em arter him."

"Good. Was he much hurt?"

"No, sir. Only a leetle hole in his shoulder. He'll be all right in a few days, I reckon. He didn't say nuthin' about it."

"He never says anything at any time," said Denton.

"No, sir. I misses old Sam Powers, awful," continued the old sailor, with a sigh; "him an' me ain't been parted fer years, an' he's sech a handy man to talk to. He gives a man a chance to talk 'thout puttin' in his oar all the time."

"Do you mean to tell me," exclaimed Lee, "that you three held this place against the whole Mexican army?"

"Well, not the whole army," said Denton, smiling.

"Yes, sir," broke in old Ben, "it wus the hull army. I should think so! An' Mr. Denton, yer, he fit like a lion. W'y, if ye ever knowed his father——"

"I have met him," said Lee, smiling.

"Well, then ye knows that he's a chip of the old block. W'y, sir——"

"Nonsense!" said Denton, flushing. "Clap a stopper on your jaw tackle, Ben!"

"In course, in course. Orders is orders, an' if I'm ordered to keep still, even though I'm chuck full of information, I'll keep quiet. I sez no more, but I wish I had old Sam Powers here."

"You're incorrigible, Ben," laughed Ned.

"Ay, ay, sir," said the old man, meekly.

"We're going to attack the enemy. If you want to fight, come along."

"Want to——"

"There, hold hard! If I'd give you a chance you'd talk us to death. Listen. You can walk with the foot soldiery or Captain Lee says he will secure you a horse."

"If it's just the same to you, Mr. Denton, I much preefers to walk, sir."

"Come along, then. Have you got any weapons?"

"I found this cutlass below an' this revolver," said Griffin, producing a cavalry officer's sabre and a cavalry officer's revolver.

"Don't you want a musket?"

"This'll do fer me. I calkilate to git close

enough to them Mexicans to make things hum 'thout a musket."

The three men descended to the causeway again. Colonel Butler's regiment of North Carolina volunteers was passing by. Captain Lee rode over to him, pointing to old Ben, and explained to him that he was a boatswain's mate who wanted to join in the fighting and would like the privilege of falling in with Colonel Butler's men.

"He's only armed for close range fighting, you see," laughed Lee.

"We'll give him a chance to get as close as he wants," said Butler. "You may fall in with the men, sir. Men!" he shouted, "here's a comrade from the United States ship *Mississippi*. We'll give him a chance to show whether he's as good as you Carolinians or not."

A roar of laughter greeted this sally of the colonel.

"I'm much obleeged," said old Ben in return, not at all abashed, "an' if I gits a chance I'll show you how the old navy allus gits there fust."

The old man trudged sturdily along with the soldiers, and being in the nature of a free lance he exchanged much rude badinage with the men. He had tongue and words enough to out-talk a whole regiment, as they soon discovered.

Meanwhile Captain Lee and Denton rode toward the head of the column, which by this time had arrived at the place Denton deemed proper for turning

out to execute the flank movement. Before they left the causeway and plunged into the lowlands, however, there was a brief halt, and the men had opportunity to snatch a hasty meal from their haversacks and canteens, an opportunity made pleasant to Ned because the general and his staff generously shared the contents of theirs with him.

The boy would have been fearfully tired under any other circumstances, he had been under such a nervous strain for so long a time, but the excitement of the situation kept him up. He had been delighted at the opportunity to take part in the battle.

The halt was over all too soon, and the division turned out of the road and took up the advance once more. Suddenly the deep boom of a cannon was heard far off to the right. Captain Lee pulled out his watch.

"One o'clock," he said; "that will be Worth's division at the tête-du-pont."

"I wonder where Lieutenant Grant is?" asked Denton.

"Wherever the fighting is going on. He is a regimental quartermaster and has really no business to be at the front at all, but he's always in the thick of it. You'll hear from him some day if he gets an opportunity to distinguish himself. He's with Garland's brigade, and I suppose they are leading the advance. Hark, there goes another gun!"

"The engagement is becoming general," said Shields. "We must push on."

As rapidly as they could over the broken ground the division plunged through the fields to the left. They had gone but a short distance before the sound of firing nearer at hand was heard.

"That will be Generals Twiggs and Pillow," said Lee.

"Yes, yes," said Denton.

"They are attacking the convent."

"Be heavens!" cried Shields, "the fight's begun and we're not in it! Forward, men! Push on, push on!"

"Patience, general, we'll have plenty of time; we'll get enough of it," said Lee.

There was no road and the country was a very difficult one over which to pass. The division struggled on and soon the sound of firing grew stronger. It grew louder, too, as they came up even with the Mexican lines. The fierceness of the American attack had been so great that the Mexicans had been concentrated in the convent, at the tête-du-pont, and between, and Shields found no troops to oppose him. The brigade passed the Churubusco River, small and shallow at that time, with some difficulty, although they found the water very refreshing. It had ceased raining, but was hot, murky, and humid to a disagreeable degree.

It was perhaps half after two when the line came out from under the trees and pushed through the cornfield bordering the road. They had completely turned the Mexican right, and saw before them,

marching down the road, a large body of Mexican soldiers. There were perhaps four thousand infantry and three thousand cavalry, which Santa Anna had ordered up with some artillery to re-enforce the position at Churubusco and stay the American advance.

If they had reached the fortifications, toward which they were marching at the double-quick, the infantry in the advance, they would probably have overwhelmed the American forces engaged there. A defeat would have been fatal, even a repulse would have been disastrous. Scott's foresight, however, had prevented this.

Shields was an excellent soldier and instantly deployed his columns from the trees and fields and threw his men at the Mexicans, the first attack being made by the several regiments in succession as they came up and formed. As soon as the Mexicans caught sight of them they halted, and the Mexican soldiers formed lines on the causeway, taking cover behind walls and in several convenient houses. Batteries were swung to the front; the horsemen gathered into two huge bodies on either flank. The American horse were commanded by Colonel Harney, Major Sumner, and Captain Phil Kearney. It was a small but highly efficient body. Shields had a few guns with him. These were unlimbered, and the battle began by an exchange of fire from the artillery of the contending parties and a series of attacks upon the several positions.

The engagement soon became general, however

with varying success; some of the American regiments took and held positions they attacked, others were repulsed. The fighting became so hot that Captain Lee presently rode back to Scott for reenforcements, which were promptly despatched.

Shields at last reformed his men, dressed his lines, and prepared for a grand and final assault upon the road, which the Mexicans assembled all their forces to resist. The charge would decide the fate of the battle. Before the American line struck the Mexican, however, the Mexican cavalry made a sweeping dash upon either flank. The American troops were halted, the regiments in the rear of either flank faced to the right and left and poured a furious discharge upon the horsemen at close range.

The Mexican cavalry made a brilliant appearance and had a high reputation, but it never did anything of any consequence in any of the battles of the war. The force of its charge was blown away by the fierce volley of the Americans. The field was full of riderless horses and dead or dying men. At the proper moment, Shields launched his own handful of cavalry upon the disorganized mass, at the same time throwing the division forward. This completed the rout of the Mexican horse. A sudden panic seized them, and they fled in terror down the causeway, pursued a short distance by the American dragoons.

Although much weakened by the rout of the cavalry, the Mexican infantry stood their ground,

and as the American troops, steadily advancing, approached within musket range, the Mexicans poured a fierce volley into their faces. The American guns had been discharged against the cavalry, and they had no means of replying. The line wavered in spite of the frantic efforts of the officers. The Americans were not beaten, however. Had it not been for the rout of the Mexican cavalry their hesitation might have been serious, for if the cavalry had fallen upon them in that critical moment, there is no telling what might have happened. But the officers halted the backward movement, the lines were reformed, muskets recharged, the regiments in reserve brought up into line, and the advance toward the causeway taken up once more.

Again the approaching troops were met by a withering fire. This time, however, firing by ranks, they poured in return volleys and then fell upon the Mexicans with the bayonet. There was no lack of courage in the Mexican army; the foot soldiers, that is, and the officers, were men of daring. The battle was desperately fought. The two armies charged and recharged, the causeway was taken and retaken. Re-enforcements came to the Mexicans and Shields put his last soldier into action.

The contest resolved itself into a desperate hand-to-hand struggle. A regiment would gain a position, hastily load, and hold it against attack. Another regiment would be driven from a position and would endeavor to retake it. Along the causeway the ar-

mies strained and fought like two great writhing serpents. Colonel Butler was shot and instantly killed. Colonels Burnett and Morgan were severely wounded. Captain Lee raged over the field a very Paladin of valor, and even the boy did wonders also. He was so full of excitement that he forgot everything but the battle itself.

Far to the south of them the roaring of guns and the smoke of conflict told them that the battle was raging there furiously also. It had been carried on for two hours and a half; what the result of it would have been on the causeway may not be foretold. But it occurred to Captain Lee, who had been taking more or less charge as Scott's representative, that a charge by the dragoons might clear the field, so he sent Denton to Colonel Harney, suggesting to him to assemble his men, withdraw from the conflict, reform, and then fall on the rear of the Mexican lines. The manœuvre was successful. The Mexicans were about exhausted anyway. The determined valor of the Americans overcame them at last, and their spirit of resistance was broken. At the same time the men from Churubusco came running along the road. They had been driven from their positions there and were in full retreat.

As Harney's dragoons fell upon them they gave way, and as soon as the first vestige of retreat appeared the army became completely disorganized. They fled in every direction. The little battle was over. So impetuous was Harney's pursuit that the

advance squadron under gallant Phil Kearney only drew rein before the City of Mexico itself.

In all that mad gallop Ned Denton had remained in the front.

"By Jove!" cried Kearney, as they came nearer the city. "I believe we could take the city itself if we had enough men. It's no use, though," he continued, reining in his horse and checking his men. "We shall have to retire, gentlemen," he said, turning away.

As he did so there was a sudden flash from the San Antonio gate. At close range the guns loaded with grape were discharged at them by Santa Anna's order. He had been swept away in the rout, and happened to be there in person. This was the second time Denton had been fired upon from those walls, and this time a bullet struck him. He reeled and fell forward in his saddle. It was the arm of a stout sergeant which prevented him from falling to the ground. There were many others killed or wounded by the same discharge, including Captain Kearney himself, whose arm was shattered.

CHAPTER XXII

AFTER THE BATTLE

KEARNEY, a man of indomitable nerve, shook his remaining arm in the direction of the gate, bade the sergeant look to the boy, and galloped rapidly down the road with his men. As soon as he was out of gunshot he halted and bade them give attention to Denton and the other officers. Then, and not till then, did he allow any attention to be given himself.

"What's the matter, Kearney?" called out Colonel Harney, riding up. "Are you hit?"

"In the arm, sir. I guess it's gone," said Kearney, faintly. The pain was very severe and he had lost much blood.

The sergeant had picked the midshipman up in his arms, and had carried him before him in the saddle.

"And your officers?"

"Answer him, Ewell," said Kearney, as he was assisted from his horse.

"Graham, sir, and Mr. Reynolds, wounded, Mills dying, and this boy—" pointing to Denton.

"Too bad, too bad!" exclaimed Colonel Harney. "Where is he hit?"

"I can't see, sir."

"Let me have a look at him," said Harney, riding closer. "Ah, in the head, evidently. His face is covered with blood."

The officer pulled out his handkerchief and wiped the face of the senseless boy.

"I suppose he is done for. No, it is only a graze, thank Heaven! He is a gallant lad, and I should not like to lose him. Have any of you a flask of whiskey?"

Whiskey was strictly contraband, and it was against orders for private soldiers to carry it, but half a dozen flasks were instantly offered to the colonel.

"Is this the way you obey orders?" he said, smiling at them. "I ought to confiscate the whole lot, and court-martial you all," he said, taking one, and forcing a little down Denton's throat. This revived the midshipman so much that he opened his eyes and strove to sit up.

"Wait a bit, lad," said Harney. "You're all right now."

"Is the battle over?" asked Ned, weakly.

"All over. The Mexicans were routed—horse, foot, and dragoons. You rode clear up to the city gate."

"I remember. They fired on us. Am I wounded?"

"Nothing to speak of."

The boy's hand went to his head.

"Yes, that's the place. It's only a scratch, however. I expect you're pretty tired out," continued

the brave colonel, who had heard of the boy's adventures. "You've done enough to-day. A strong man would have gone down under the exertion, much less a boy—pardon me—a young man and a young officer. Can you sit your horse again?"

"I think so," said Denton.

"Here, take another drink of this. It will fix you up."

Restored by the powerful stimulant, the boy climbed on his horse again and the whole party proceeded down the road at a much more leisurely pace than they had ridden up it. Two or three abandoned wagons were made fit for Kearney and the more severely wounded. Ned felt very faint and weak, but with the assistance of the sergeant, who, by Harney's orders, rode by his side, he managed to stay in the saddle. He had about reached the limit of his endurance, however.

The road gave evidence of the fierce battle that had taken place upon it. It was filled with abandoned wagons, broken gun carriages, shattered guns, dead horses, wounded men, and dead bodies as well. It was a horrible sight to the youngster. All the glory and enthusiasm of the fight had left him. The sight was appalling.

About a mile from the place where the fiercest struggle had taken place on the causeway, they saw a solitary figure rolling along the road toward them. He was dressed in a nondescript uniform. A pair of ragged seamen's trousers, a blue shirt with a sol-

dier's coat, and a Mexican sombrero comprised his marvellous costume. He carried a cavalry officer's sabre in his right hand, the blade thickly crusted with blood and dirt. He rolled, as he walked, like a 74 in a gale of wind. Under the tan of his face might have been white. There was a look of deep anxiety in his countenance. When he caught sight of the dragoons and recognized that they were Americans, he broke into a lumbering run.

"Have you seed anythin' of a young gent, a small midshipman officer, hereabouts, yer honor?" he inquired, knuckling the sombrero as if it were a seaman's cap.

"Who are you?" asked Harney.

"Chief bo's'n's mate of the *Mississippi*, sir, an' I'm lookin' for my officer."

"Here I am, Griffin," said Denton, weakly, riding to the front.

"Well, thank God I sees you again, Mr. Denton," said the old man, looking affectionately at the boy. "I've been all over the field a-lookin' fer ye. Nobody could tell me anythin' about you except that soger man that ye cruised with, Cap'n Lee. He said you wus gone with the calav'ry, and knowin' how onsartain this horse bisness is, I wus gettin' werry anxious, sir. Be you wounded, sir?" he went on, with a note of concern in his voice.

"It's nothing, Ben. Only a graze. I'm tired out. That's all."

"Well, if we could git a night in 'stead of standin'

watch all the time it would be a blessin'," said the old man. "'Thout Sam Powers here to adwise me, bein' my chief adwiser, an' you gone, bein' my commandin' officer, I've been flyin' a broad pennant all to myself."

"I think we'll have plenty of time to sleep to-night," said Harney, "at least you will. I don't believe there's any more fighting left in those Mexicans. How goes the action in the village, I wonder?"

"It seems to hev stopped, yer honor. Leastways, w'en I wus comin' away not a shot wus heerd. I seed a lot of them Mexicans lookin' every w'ich way, to wind'ard, close hauled, jammed up, runnin' free, layin' all sorts of courses, in fact, an' goin' under all stuns'ls, too."

"I guess we have carried everything—as usual," said Harney, laughing at the old man's expressions.

At this moment Captain Lee rejoined the party.

"What's happened, Lee?" asked the colonel.

"We've cleaned them out."

"Good!"

"Where have you been?"

"Up to the city's gate in pursuit," answered the bold dragoon colonel nonchalantly. "That is, Kearney's squadron only stopped there. He could have taken the town if we'd had a force to hold it."

"Is that young Denton?"

"Yes."

"Is he wounded?"

"Nothing to speak of, I am happy to say."

"I am glad also," returned Lee. "You have rendered valuable services to-day, Mr. Denton, and General Scott shall hear of it. Did you get into the fight, Master Griffin?" he asked, turning to the old sailor.

"Did I git into it, sir? Did ye ever know the time w'en an American seaman didn't git into all the fightin' fer the honor of the navy wot wus comin' his way? Ax them—no, I fergot, the kunnel's dead, killed at the head of his crew—regiment, I means. He wus a brave man, sir."

"He got into it all right," said the major of Butler's regiment, riding up. "He fought like a demon over the body of poor Colonel Butler. If it hadn't been for him it might have been taken. And, gentlemen, I give you my word, he never stopped talking from the time he began to fight until the whole battle was over. I think he talked some of the Mexicans to death."

"Ay, ay, sir," said old Ben, not in the least abashed; "ain't there some Scriptural alludin's in the Bible to somebody bein' talked to death by somebody's jaw tackle?"

"It was a jawbone, I think," laughed Lee, "and the jawbone of an ass, with which Samson slew one thousand Philistines."

"Well, if the jawbone of an ass is good fer a thousand Philistines, wotever them are, I axes you, with all due respect, sir, how many Mexicans do

ye think the jawbone of an American sailor sech as —I mention no names, sir, but a prime seaman as I hev in mind—could account fer?"

"A whole army!" laughed Lee, riding on.

The assault upon the town of Churubusco had been brilliantly successful. Scott's faultless plans had been carried out with machine-like precision. After a severe engagement of several hours the tête-du-pont had been carried by storm by Worth's men, and shortly after that the church on the left had fallen before the American columns.

One of the first men over the walls was Lieutenant Grant. As Captain Lee had said, he was the quartermaster of his regiment, and had no business in the fighting line at all; but, as Captain Lee had also said, more prophetically than he knew, Lieutenant Grant was of such an energetic, pugnacious disposition that the world was bound to hear from him, if he only got the opportunity. Indeed, the world did hear from him, and from Captain Lee also, in the most Titanic battle struggle of all history, from the Rapidan to the James, in Virginia in 1864. And they both of them had done a mighty sight of brilliant and successful fighting in the three years before that, too!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE KINDNESS OF GENERAL SCOTT

Late in the evening of that eventful twentieth of August, one of the most memorable days in American history, General Scott with his staff rode through the village of Churubusco until he came to the encampment of the division which General Shields had handled with such conspicuous gallantry. Supplies had been forwarded in the wake of the army, and although the tents had not yet come up camp-fires were burning, and the soldiers, after their hard, desperate fighting, were cooking supper. The surgeons were busy with the wounded, of whom there were many ; the prisoners, of whom there were more, were being escorted to the rear ; and other preparations were being made for an early advance on the morrow. The army was in excellent spirits. Beginning with Contreras in the morning it had fought practically five engagements during the day, and in every case gained a decided victory over greatly superior forces.

It was a small army, but one of the most efficient that ever followed the American flag. It had been hammered and moulded into shape by one

of the ablest organizers and tacticians this country had then, or has till this day, ever seen; and it had proved its mettle grandly in the supremest test of battle. The names of many of the heroes of that war were overshadowed by those of the greater and more Titanic conflict of the War of 1861–65, but man for man, officer for officer, the army that invaded Mexico was equal to any that ever fought. Some, in fact nearly all, of the officers who gained distinction later in our history participated in this war, did gallant service, and learned many lessons.

People had ridiculed General Scott for very many reasons, among them being an incautious reference that he made in one of his letters to "a hasty plate of soup" which he had taken! They jeered behind his back at his somewhat absurd punctiliousness. His pompousness excited the laughter of a people easily moved to merriment and possessed of a high sense of humor. His military parade, which earned him the title of "Old Fuss-and-Feathers," was a very delectable subject about which to joke in an army given to jesting—and in all American armies joking has prevailed.

But in spite of these unfortunate traits of character, General Scott was a great man, a great soldier, and a great gentleman, who rendered conspicuous, it might almost be said vital, services to his country in no less than three periods widely removed, 1812, 1847, and 1861. And the soldiers of that army of invasion on that night were filled with enthusiasm

for their general. The American soldier is always a keen individual who knows a captain when he sees one, and the brilliant planning, which they had carried to a successful issue, was apparent even to the privates; and soldiers will forgive a commander any sort of treatment, they will pardon any vagary, if he only succeeds. Scott had succeeded. In the most overwhelming manner he had demonstrated anew his capacity and courage.

"I can't spare General Grant," said Abraham Lincoln years after to certain people who urged him on various grounds to dispense with Grant's services. "I can't spare General Grant. He fights."

Scott was a fighter. He had both physical and moral courage. He could fight himself and he could fight his men. He had shown the former courage at Chippewa, confirmed it at Lundy's Lane, where he had been in the very thick of the most desperate fighting. He had shown the latter at Cerro Gordo and that day at Churubusco. Not that he had been out of range there, either, for he had not. He had exposed himself freely. Perhaps he had shown it most of all by cutting loose from his base of supplies and invading Mexico with only ten thousand men! Considering the changed character of the opposition he was as daring as Cortez—and as successful.

As the men in the improvised camps by the roadside saw the tall, imposing form of their general—he was the biggest man in the army physically as well as in every other way—riding down the cause-

way, they left their fires, and picking up burning brands for torches waved them above their heads while they broke into vociferous cheers. It was like the salute the Emperor Napoleon received that winter night before the battle of Austerlitz, when his grenadiers burned their bivouac straw in honor of their great captain.

The old general was intensely gratified by this demonstration of respect and affection, and he halted before General Shields, who came running from his temporary headquarters to receive his commander.

"General Shields," the old man began, in that deep, powerful voice which had such carrying qualities that the soldiers used to say that it could be heard distinctly above the thunder of a battery of artillery, "General Shields, on this day, sir, on which all have done nobly, you and your men, volunteers as well as regulars"—an allusion to the fact that a large part of Shields's brigade were New York and Carolina volunteers—"deserve especial praise. I heard from Captain Lee, of my staff, of the desperate character of the contest which you waged, alone and unsupported, with an overwhelming force of the enemy. You were removed from my eye, sir, and not for some hours under my personal command, but I felt every confidence in the result of your exertions and those of your brave men, and the confidence was more than justified by the results."

"Ah, general," returned Shields, blushing with pleasure at this direct, if well-deserved compliment,

"'twas the b'ys that did it. They're the b'ys for fightin'. We only want another chance to show what we can do. If you will plan it, sir, we'll attack the whole Mexican army to-morrow. We're ready for anythin'."

"Three cheers for General Scott and General Shields!" cried a voice out of the darkness.

The heartiness with which the cheers were given was evidence that the latter had but spoken truly as to the spirit of his men.

"Speaking of your boys, sir," said Scott, "where is the youth who volunteered to act as guide—the young naval officer, I mean?"

"He ought to be here, sir," answered Shields, looking around. "Why, there he is," he said, pointing backward toward the fire, where the figure of the midshipman was stretched out on the ground.

"Is he wounded?" asked the general, dismounting from his horse as he did so.

"I think not, sir," said Shields, following Scott, who stepped toward the fire, remarking:

"I should like to commend him for his efforts to-day."

The boy was fast asleep on a blanket, his head pillowed on a knapsack. Seated by his side, his knees drawn up and his head buried in his arms resting upon them, was another figure. General Shields called out:

"Mr. Denton!" and as the boy made no move he leaned down and shook the sitting figure.

In an instant old Ben Griffin was on his feet fumbling for his cutlass.

"Don't bother about your sabre, my man," said Shields. "Here is General Scott, who wants to speak to Mr. Denton."

"Beggin' yer honor's pardon," said the boatswain's mate, recognizing the two officers, "he's turned in, an' I don't think it'd be wise to disturb him. He's had sech a day of it as don't often fall to a young gentleman, sir. But ef the general wants him——"

"Nay, my dear General Shields," interposed Scott, turning away, "he's only a boy, and if he can sleep let him do so. I see he has his head bound up."

"It's nuthin', yer honor," said Griffin; "he rode with the calavr'ymen to the city gates an' wus grazed by a shot. He'll be all right in the mornin'."

Denton had actually slept all through the whole of the cheering and the commotion caused by the commanding officer's visit. In fact, he did not awaken until morning.

"I hear Kearney was wounded," said Scott, turning away.

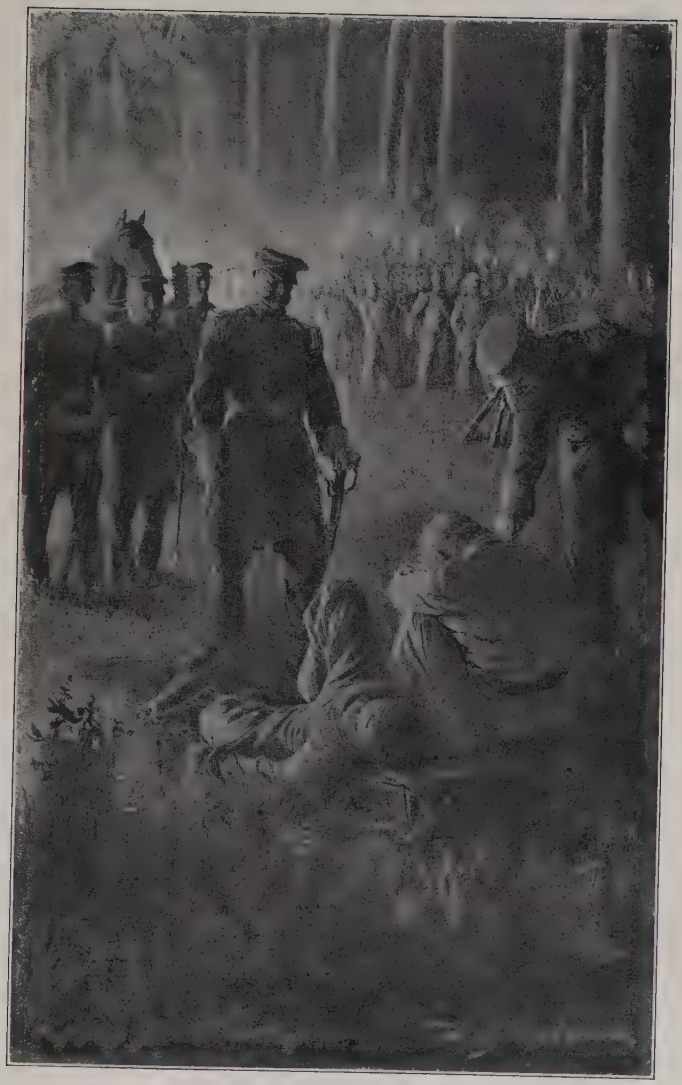
"Yes, sir," answered Shields, "he had his arm shattered. I doubt it will have to come off."

"Where is he?"

"The surgeons are working on him and the rest back in the field hospital beyond there."

"Take me to him. By the way, who is that old man?"

"Wot, sir? Me, sir? I'm chief bo's'n's mate on



The Boy was Fast Asleep.

the United States frigate *Mississippi!*" exclaimed old Ben, answering for himself, as usual, before anybody had a chance to put in a word. "Part of a shore party under Mr. Denton's command. We're a leetle out of our latitood here, sir, but we're co-operatin' with the army all right, sir. W'y, sir, if you'd seed that boy fightin', yer honor——"

"That will do!" remarked the general in his most austere manner. "Bid your officer report to me at headquarters in the morning. I shall be at Tacubaya."

"Ay, ay, sir. He'll be werry glad, sir, I knows, yer honor."

But Scott turned on his heel and, followed by Shields, went toward the hospital. He would not have allowed a soldier in the army to address him at that length under any circumstances, but he felt that some indulgence must be permitted a garrulous old salt from the sister service.

In the hospital the surgeons were working desperately over the more severely wounded. General Scott passed slowly between the ranks of men lying upon blankets thrown on the ground, or on stretchers, or, in the most serious cases, on improvised cots, addressing words of praise and commendation here and there, which he knew well how to do. He stopped before the cot of Captain Phil Kearney, the gallant dragoon.

"Captain Kearney," said the general, "I am sorry to hear of your wound. Is it serious?"

"Faith, sir," said Kearney, "it's the loss of an arm."

"I have heard of your gallant charge, Captain Kearney, and how you rode to the very gates of the city. The world shall know it as well, sir Could you have entered the city?"

"Entered it, sir? If I had had a regiment of infantry, I believe I could have taken it."

"It was well done, sir. Not every soldier has the opportunity of distinguishing himself which you have had, and many of those who do enjoy such opportunities fail to embrace them."

"Faith, sir, for those words," said Kearney, gallantly, "I'd cheerfully lose another arm."

"Don't, Captain Kearney. Your country needs the one that remains. Good-night, sir."

It was attentions such as these which marked Scott's intercourse with his men, and which, in spite of the things which have been mentioned, thoroughly endeared him to them. Under his tightly laced coat beat a warm and generous heart.

The next morning the army was greeted with the news of an armistice which had been agreed upon, during which Mr. Trist, the Peace Commissioner appointed by the President, would endeavor to arrange for a termination of the war. The army was accordingly concentrated around Tacubaya, opposite Chapultepec; the supply-trains were brought up; suitable places for permanent encampments were chosen; and everybody devoted himself to recuperation from the hardships of the campaign.

Denton found himself not much the worse for his slight wound and for all his exciting adventures. As for Griffin, barring the fact that he lamented their enforced stay on shore, he looked as fit as he ever did. Dressing himself more in accordance with his rank, by the assistance of his generous friends of the army, and accompanied by old Ben Griffin as an escort, for the old man had positively refused to leave him even though he had to get on a horse again to follow his young commander, Denton repaired that afternoon to General Scott's headquarters.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MIDSHIPMAN BECOMES A SOLDIER

THE general was very busy, and the building in which he had established his headquarters was filled with officers, coming and going, making reports, receiving orders, and so on. He had to wait some time before the general could receive him, but Captain Lee, who presently came out of the private room which the general occupied, at once came over and spoke to him with his usual kindliness, and then he introduced him to a number of officers, old and young, who all endeavored to make him feel, as he speedily did, very much at home.

Presently the door of the inner apartment opened and one of the aides, who spoke with a very decided German accent, and who answered to the name of Rosecrans, directed him to enter. Inside the room were Captain Lee, Captain Beauregard, Lieutenant McClellan, and a number of other officers. The boy saluted and stood at attention.

"Who is that?" asked Scott, looking beyond the midshipman.

"Wot, sir? Me, sir? I'm chief bo's'n's mate on the——"

"Yes, yes, I remember," remarked the general, hastily. "What are you doing here, sirrah?"

"I follers my officer, sir," returned Ben, making a sea scrape and knuckling his forehead. "We never parts company, him an' me, sir, an'——"

"That will do!" interrupted Scott, severely.

Old Ben, not much abashed, subsided, while the officers standing around bit their lips to keep from laughing.

"Mr. Denton," continued Scott, "I sent for you to express my personal gratification and thanks to you for your valuable services yesterday. Not only did you give us information of great use, but you personally led General Shields's division into action. For so young an officer, sir, you have shown an unusual degree of ability. I am persuaded that the country possesses in you one who may render valuable services when years and experience have added to your present qualities. It will give me great pleasure to mention you in the despatches. I am writing to Commodore Perry, and will forward any report you wish to make him. At the same time I offer you a position on my staff. Lieutenant Semmes is of the opinion that your services will not be needed on the *Mississippi*, and pending a reply from the commodore he advises that you accept it. I shall direct the paymaster-general to look after your finances, too. I believe you are too much exhausted by your various adventures to think of travelling for some time anyway. As there may be more

fighting, for I hardly hope the Mexicans will accept our terms, you may have further opportunities of distinction."

"Hurray!" shouted the irrepressible old boatswain's mate. "Master Ned, you an' the United States Navy is——"

"Silence!" thundered Scott, looking daggers at the reckless old sailor.

"Ay, ay, sir," promptly returned the old man, knuckling his forehead again.

This time he saw from the general's frowning brow that it would not be safe for him to say another word. He knew when to keep silent, although he rarely kept so!

"Thank you very much, general," said Denton. "I suppose I am scarcely fit for travel yet, and I shall appreciate very much the honor of being on your staff. Besides, sir, one of my men was wounded yesterday and I'd like to look after him. I will prepare my report, sir, and then, under your orders, will wait to hear from Commodore Perry."

"You had some strange adventures, I take it," said Scott.

"Yes, sir."

At that moment Lieutenant Rosecrans announced the arrival of Lieutenant Grant with a message from General Worth.

"Admit him," said the general. "Ah, Lieutenant Grant," as the young man came in and delivered the message, "I am glad to see you, sir. I under-

stand that you distinguished yourself in the attack on the tête-du-pont yesterday. This is Midshipman Denton."

"It was Lieutenant Grant who rescued the three sailors from the house of which I told you and sent them over to me, sir," interrupted Captain Lee.

"I remember," answered Scott. "Well, I shall hear about it later. Meanwhile, as my own staff officers are very busy, perhaps you will look after Mr. Denton for me for a day or two, Mr. Grant, until he is able to look after himself, which, if I may judge from the usual readiness of sailors, will be in a very short time."

"Certainly, sir, I shall be glad to do it," said Grant, saluting, and the two turned and left the room together, followed, of course, by the old sailor.

"I'm very glad to be of service to you, Mr. Denton," said the young lieutenant, as they left the house and came out on the road; "if you will come over to my headquarters with the Fourth Infantry, Garland's brigade of Twiggs's division, I will look out for you. I am quartermaster of the regiment, and have a little more liberty than the other subalterns. Bring your man, too, and we'll bunk together somehow or other."

"You are very kind," said Denton, who felt strangely attracted to this kindly, if rather taciturn, young officer. "I have two things to do, then I'll come back and hunt you up."

"What is it you have to do? Perhaps I can help you."

"First, I want to find my man Powers, who was wounded."

"I sent him back yesterday to the hospital of General Worth's division. You will find it about a mile back on the road."

"Thank you. Then I want to find out where Lieutenant Bailey of the Marines is."

"They are down at San Augustin, guarding the depot there. Are these horses yours?"

"They are two lent me by Captain Lee."

"You can use them to-day, and if you come to my headquarters to-morrow I'll try to get a couple of good ones for you permanently. We took a lot of cavalrymen and horses yesterday, and I'll see what can be done for you. Do you want any money? Not that I have very much," said the lieutenant, smiling.

"No, thank you, not any. The general directed the paymaster to advance me some, and I shall be all right. It's mighty good of you to offer me some though," said the boy, gratefully.

"Not at all," returned Grant; "you fellows made a plucky fight on that housetop and—well, I like a fighter, you know."

The young soldier set his lips rather grimly as he said this, although there was a pleasant twinkle in his eye as he spoke.

"Ay, ay, sir," put in old Ben, "that wus a purty

scrimmage as ever I seed. W'y, sir, you'd never believe it, but this yer young gent he fit like a lion. Me an' old Sam Powers couldn't do no better."

"Ben," said Denton, sharply, "you got yourself in a scrape a few moments ago by talking. I want you to stow that under hatches and keep it there. Batten yourself down."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the old man, reproachfully.

"I like a fighter," continued the young lieutenant, looking with some amusement at the two, the huge old sailor and his boyish commander, "but I like a silent fighter best."

"In course, in course, so do I," returned the incorrigible Ben, saluting as the lieutenant rode away.

"Ben, you'll be the death of me," laughed Denton.

"Silent fighters is all werry well fer the army. There's too many of 'em to talk, but w'en you git to the navy an' a man gits to hev the rank of a bo's'n's mate, an' chief bo's'n's mate at that, he's got to do a deal of talkin'. I reckon a sartain able-bodied seaman as I knows on could hold his end up with the hull United States army.

"I tell you wot it is, Mr. Denton, there ain't nobody wot kin beat us old sailormen w'en our talkers is runnin' free, unless it be one of them fellers wot drives the army mulewagins. I heerd one of them talkin' to his mules this mornin', w'ich they wus grounded on a mud shoal, an' the langwidge he used!—scuttle me, sir, it made me proud to think he

wus a American citizen same ez me. To think that sech a mastery of words wus in our kentry! I don't know, but I think mebbe that man could outmatch even me a-talkin'."

"Great heaven, Ben, stow it!" cried Denton. "Pipe down and board that horse. We're going to hunt up Powers."

The boy was so unfeeling as to set the pace at a rapid gallop, which turned the conversation of Griffin into a series of disconnected ejaculations of a very vigorous and unecclesiastical character. They found Powers easily enough in the division hospital. As usual, the man had made no complaint. The surgeon in charge of the ward remarked that he had scarcely said ten words since they brought him in. The wound he had sustained was in the fleshy part of his shoulder, and he would be all right in a day or two. His eyes twinkled when he saw the midshipman and old Ben. He raised his left hand, knuckled his forehead with it as he lay on the cot. He strove to raise himself, but Denton gently forced him back.

"Sam Powers," said Griffin, "you don't know how I misses you. I miss yer most instructive silence, w'ich I don't have nobody to talk to now. It's wonderful how stimulatin' a man can be w'en he never says nuthin'. I'm jest beginnin' to understand wot an agreeable pusson ye are, 'cause ye lets me do most of the talkin' myself. We're bein' well took care of here; in fact, if I didn't seem to be etarnally

a-settin' on a hoss, I'd hev lots of comfort. We're goin' to stay here an' wait fer you, too. We had a most glorious scrimmage yistidday, an' me an' a general named Shields, with Mr. Denton's assistance, cleaned out the hull Mexican army. We wished you wus there too. Not that you could hev been much use in the counsellin' line, but you're a fighter all right."

"Umph!" said Powers, as usual!

They left soon after, the surgeon, learning that his patient belonged to the navy, promising to look after him especially. Outside the hospital tents they took horse again and galloped down to San Augustin to hunt up Denton's particular friend, Joe Bailey. They found that youngster in a most discontented state of mind, the whole marine corps likewise, in fact. They were thoroughly angered with General Scott. Bailey said that they had had no opportunity since they got in the valley to show what they could do. They had brought up the rear all the time, and had been guarding depots while the rest of the army was winning fame and glory at the front.

Bailey was awfully glad to see Denton, however. When he learned that his friend was to have a position on General Scott's staff, he suggested that he take early opportunity to bring the claims of the marines to the general's attention, a thing which Denton, entirely ignorant of the forms of military procedure, or the characteristics of the situation, immediately promised to do.

Bailey wanted Denton to remain with him, but as he had been directed to Grant by the general himself, he thought it would be better for him to keep to his original plan, so toward evening the young man and the old sailor mounted their horses and rode back to Lieutenant Grant's headquarters. For a wonder, old Ben had not said a word, save to answer questions, for almost an hour.

"It may be, Mr. Denton," he took early opportunity to say, as they left the company of marines, "that you mought hev noticed that I hev not done much talkin' fer the last hour."

"It's such an unusual occurrence, Ben," said Denton, "that I noticed it immediately. Why was it?"

"It's them blasted marines, salt-water sogers!" returned the sailor. "I can't abide 'em. If I opened my mouth I mought a-said somethin' like that mule-driver said, so I thinks it's better to keep silence, unless I wants to kill 'em."

"That's valuable information, Ben," laughed Denton; "after this, when I want to keep you quiet I'll just turn you over to a marine."

"Ye better make it a hull comp'ny," said Ben, smiling grimly, "fer I'd jest nacherally eat up one, or a dozen of 'em, as fer as that goes."

CHAPTER XXV

BEFORE MOLINOS DEL REY

The peace negotiations unfortunately came to nothing. The Mexicans had not yet been sufficiently beaten to accept the hard conditions of the Americans. Although their outer defences had been carried and their armies consistently routed by the Americans, they were not without hopes of turning the tide of victory at the last moment in the final encounter. They were yet in possession of their capital, a strongly fortified city of two hundred thousand people. Santa Anna, who certainly showed unbounded energy and desperate resolution, had occupied the period of the armistice in strengthening the inner defences, in assembling his resources, and had strained every nerve to re-create a practical national defence.

There was no lack of patriotism in the citizens of the city, at least, and many of all ranks and stations were enrolled in the army as volunteers, which by that means was swelled in number to nearly thirty thousand men. Although the drill and discipline of this army were poor, and its efficiency correspondingly low, it constituted a dangerous force

when fighting behind scientifically planned and formidable fortifications. To oppose to these the Americans had now less than ten thousand men, but these were veterans, flushed with victory and confident of success.

Scott, having given fair warning to Santa Anna of the termination of the armistice, at once entered upon a vigorous prosecution of the campaign. His headquarters were still at the little town of Tacubaya, about three miles southwest of the city. This place was situated on the Acapulco Road, one of the greatest thoroughfares in Mexico, a magnificent causeway through the lowlands. About a mile from his headquarters the road divided into two branches, each one of which led to one of the more important gates of the city. Just at the forks of the roads there was that singular geological formation, in the shape of a vast and impassable porphyritic rock which rose abruptly from the level of the plain for a distance of two hundred and fifty feet, which has been noted before. Its top was crowned by a great castle, the guns of which commanded completely both roads.

On the east, north, and south, this huge excrescence, called the hill of Chapultepec, an Aztec word meaning "Grasshopper Hill," was completely inaccessible. On the western side, however, the slope was gentle and covered thickly with great old trees, under whose shade the Aztec monarchs of three hundred years before had been wont to take refuge

from the heats of summer. The place was now, in addition to being the main defence of the city in that direction, the home of the Military College of Mexico, as has been said.

The slope on the west was defended by fortifications ranged at convenient points along the ascent. At the foot of the hill, and extending westward further to protect the vulnerable western slope of the rock, lay a series of well-planned defences.

General Scott determined to approach the city by means of the Acapulco Road and its two branches. To do this it was necessary to capture the fort on Chapultepec. Before this could be done it was further necessary to seize or destroy the defences at the foot of the hill.

There had been an estrangement between General Scott and his most eminent officer, General Worth, and the commander-in-chief, actuated, it is believed, by a noble desire to set matters right, committed to that officer the capture of the works at the foot of Chapultepec. He allowed him to make the plan of battle himself, and to carry out everything without supervision from the commanding general. He gave him all the forces that he asked for, and only required of him success. It was an enviable position for a subordinate officer to occupy.

Nobly did General Worth rise to the measure of his responsibility. He elected to do the work with his own division, comprising Garland's and Clark's

brigades, with Cadwalader's brigade of Pillow's division, three troops of dragoons, and a company of mounted riflemen under Major Sumner, nine guns, seven of which were light field pieces, and two heavy twenty-four-pounder siege guns. His total force was a little under thirty-two hundred men.

As soon as Ned Denton learned of the projected attack, which, from his position on General Scott's staff, was about as soon as anybody in the army, he asked permission of Scott to join the attacking forces. The permission was readily granted. General Worth's permission having also been received, the latter offered the midshipman a position on his staff, which was gladly accepted.

Poor Joe Bailey complained that the soldiers had all the luck, for, in spite of strenuous representations, the marines were not given an opportunity to distinguish themselves on this occasion, although Scott promised that they should be allotted the foremost position in the very next engagement, and with that assurance they had to be content.

Denton had not been idle during the two weeks that had elapsed. For one thing, he had regained his health and vigor, and, for another, his kind friend, Lieutenant Grant, who was a thorough horseman, had taught him how to ride. In this interesting school his other friend, Captain Lee, had added a few perfecting graceful touches. Denton in turn had tried to teach old Ben Griffin, but the sailor

would have none of it. He said he never expected to be on land again if he could help it; he had had enough of it on this cruise to last him his lifetime, and he did not see the use of spending time acquiring useless accomplishments. He could stick on if he had to, and that was enough—and, as usual, Sam Powers agreed with him!

The old man was a prime favorite in the Fourth Infantry, Lieutenant Grant's regiment, to which he had attached himself as a sort of licensed volunteer. He was welcome at everybody's mess, and found life very agreeable. He remarked afterward that he did not know it was in "sogers" to be such good fellows. He had hated and despised them all his life, and was just finding out that they were much the same as sailormen, which was a high compliment indeed. Powers, too, had recovered from his wound, and had joined the boatswain's mate, whose faithful shadow he became again.

Lieutenant Grant became very much attached to Powers. He was a glorious fighter, this speechless sailorman, as Lieutenant Grant learned, and being a silent man himself the two held long and voiceless interviews, in which neither of them said a word. But they understood each other thoroughly nevertheless. Indeed, Powers presently attached himself to the young lieutenant, with Denton's permission, of course, and he finally succeeded in deposing the soldier who had acted as the lieutenant's striker. With a seaman's ready handiness he performed the

duties of that responsible office, and performed them exceedingly well. Lieutenant Grant was never before so comfortable in the camp.

Late in the afternoon of the seventh of September, Denton came clattering up the field officers' street of the camp of the Fourth Infantry, sprang from his horse and rushed toward Grant's tent.

"Mr. Grant!" he cried.

"Well?"

The boy looked hastily around him to see that they were alone.

"We attack to-night, or, rather, to-morrow morning."

"Good!"

"I had it straight from headquarters. Worth's division and Cadwalader's brigade, with some guns and cavalry, are detailed for the purpose. General Worth is to plan it himself."

"It will be well planned."

"Yes, won't it? I asked General Scott to let me go, and he told me to report to General Worth, and he offered me a position on his staff."

"Good!"

"I'd rather get into the real fighting, though."

"Don't worry about that. I know General Worth. You'll get all the fighting you want before you get through. Besides, you can join any party after the battle commences, or it may be the general will ask you to carry orders. Then you can gallop down the line," continued the young officer,

his eyes twinkling, "and get your name in the despatches again."

"Of course," cried the boy. "I hope so."

"You see, we of the army are jealous, you know. You have been mentioned already."

"Oh, come now, Mr. Grant, this isn't fair. I only got mentioned once anyhow."

"You deserved it. What are you going to do with your men?"

"I suppose I shall take Ben Griffin with me."

"I'll look out for Powers if you wish. I like that man. He keeps his mouth shut."

"I wish you would," said the boy. "He likes you too. If you get in a tight place you'll find he's a tremendous fighter. It seems to be he bottles himself up so that he's chock full of energy. Old Griffin's all right, too, but next to him I believe I'd rather have Powers back of me than anyone else."

"That's the most talkative man of yours I ever saw, or heard, rather. He'd drive me mad in an hour."

"He does keep going, that's true, but he's one of the finest seamen I ever came across, and simply invaluable on a ship. He says this army life is disorganizing to him. It isn't like the discipline of the sea. He says he's pining to get back, too, but I think he is enjoying it immensely."

"Do you know anything about the plans for tonight?"

"No, but if I hear anything I'll tell you. That is, provided I can, of course, without violating orders."

"Of course," answered Grant, gravely. "Where are you going now?"

"Back to General Worth's headquarters immediately," returned Denton, importantly. "He may need me."

"I see."

"Will you tell Powers?"

"Yes."

"Good-by, Lieutenant Grant. You have been awfully good to me and if anything happens——"

"To me, or you?"

"To either of us. I want you to know that I appreciate it. I hope some day to have a chance to show it."

"That's all right," returned the officer. "Shall I see you before the attack?"

"Yes, if I can be spared. You won't forget about Powers?"

"No. Good-by."

Ned Denton was the busiest man of the army. General Worth was a quick-tempered, nervous, and somewhat irascible old man, and he kept everybody on the jump. He found work even for the midshipman. If he had had an entire army detailed on his staff he would have found something for all of them to do. There was a great deal of planning to be done anyway. The works they were to attack were

peculiar. Directly opposite the village of Tacubaya, where the headquarters were located, and about a mile away, was a low stone building about six hundred feet long. It was built of red sandstone. Its thick heavy walls rose two or three feet above the roofs and the yards between the detached buildings included in the pile were closed by strong and heavy doors guarded by barricades. The building extended in a northern and southern direction. It had been used for powder mills and a gun foundry, and the cluster was known as Molinos del Rey, or the King's Mills.

Fifteen hundred feet due west of the upper end of the mill was a square bastioned fort with a wide ditch, scarp, and counter-scarp, constructed in accordance with the most improved principles of fortification. This was called Casa Mata and contained a large magazine used for storing powder. The left of the Mexican line occupied Molinos del Rey, the right the Casa Mata. Beyond the Casa Mata there were earthworks and troops for a short distance, the extreme right resting upon a deep and hazardous barranca, or ravine. Between this and also between the two buildings heavy Mexican forces had been concentrated behind slight defensive works. Two miles northwest of Chapultepec, whose guns overlooked and covered the position, the Mexican cavalry, some four thousand strong, under General Alvarez, stood ready to protect the Mexican right.

The force inside the works numbered some four

thousand men. It was ample, indeed, to hold the position. During the night six field pieces were moved down and planted in the interval between the Molinos del Rey and Casa Mata, which were later moved over in front of the mill; the Mexican position was, therefore, an extraordinarily strong one.

Captain Beauregard, with other engineer officers, had made careful examinations of the position, and General Worth was fully informed of the perilous character of his undertaking. He planned wisely enough. Garland's brigade, comprising the Second and Third Artillery acting as infantry, and the Fourth Infantry, were ordered to demonstrate on the right, with instructions, if it became practicable, to carry the mill by assault. Clark's brigade, comprising the Fifth, Sixth, and Eighth Infantry, all under Colonel MacIntosh, was to assault the Casa Mata. A storming party of five hundred picked men, all of whom volunteered, with fourteen officers under Major Wright, was ordered to carry the six-gun battery in the Mexican centre. Cadwalader's brigade and Sumner's cavalry were to act as a reserve to support MacIntosh, or Wright, or Garland, as necessity arose.

With Garland were the two six-pounder guns of Drum's battery. Opposite Molinos del Rey, as being the most formidable portion of the defences, were Huger's two heavy siege guns, while Duncan's field pieces were placed so as to attack Casa Mata.

During the night of the seventh all these preparations were completed, and at three o'clock on the morning of the eighth the columns were on the march. Before four o'clock they had reached their designated positions. The day was just beginning to break at the time. Every preparation had been made and there was nothing left now but to put the issue to the test. General Worth, from a position in the rear of MacIntosh's brigade, waited quietly for daylight, watch in hand. He always became cool when the moment of action approached, and in the thick of battle he was as quiet and composed as he was excited and nervous before the attack was joined.

Finally he shut his watch with a snap, and thrust it back in his pocket.

"Four o'clock," he said, looking back toward his staff.

It was quite light now and he could mark the eager enthusiasm in Denton's face. The old man smiled.

"Mr. Denton," he said, quietly, "oblige me by asking Captain Huger to open fire."

CHAPTER XXVI

SAM POWERS IS PIPED OVER THE SIDE

It was the business of the siege guns to endeavor to make a breach in the wall of the mill. Huger's artillerists were quite ready. The command had scarcely been given before the two heavy cannon belched out their thunder. They had gone in battery but six hundred yards from the mill, and the gun practice was excellent. Both shot struck the mill, tearing off heavy pieces of the soft friable masonry. Instantly all was animation in the Mexican line. Drums were beaten, alarms sounded, men sprang into their positions. Two miles away the cavalry, under Alvarez, heard the deep boom of the cannon; horses were saddled, trumpets sounded, and they moved down the road at a smart trot toward the sound of the firing.

Meantime the artillerymen loaded and fired the huge monsters with surprising rapidity. General Worth, riding over toward them, complimented them on their excellent firing, and, after ten rounds had been fired, gave the order to advance. The storming party, led by Major Wright, ran toward the centre of the Mexican line under cover of the smoke.

They were unaware that the guns they were to take had been moved until they had gone some distance, when they were subjected to a deadly discharge of grape and shrapnel at short range upon the right flank, where the guns had been placed in front of the mill.

Undismayed, however, although many fell, they pressed gallantly on, Major Wright leading them bravely. They cheered loudly as they ran. At the same time MacIntosh's brigade moved toward the left, but more slowly, preserving excellent alignment. Before the Mexican gunners could reload, Wright's men were upon them.

With this assaulting column Ben Griffin had elected to charge. It contained as volunteers several of his particular friends of the Fourth Infantry. The old man refused to take a musket, but armed himself with a cavalry sabre, the nearest substitute for a ship's cutlass, and a pistol. Sailors are not much on leg-work, but the old man kept up with the front rank without any difficulty.

The forlorn hope burst upon the Mexicans like a storm. There was a wild, fierce mêlée over the guns, the gunners were shot down or bayoneted, and the chief of one of the sections had his head nearly cut off by a mighty sweep of the sailor's blade. The charge had been brilliantly successful, although attended with heavy loss. However, the Mexicans did not give up. Rallied by the enthusiastic gallantry of their officers they turned on the

storming party. A prompt discharge of musketry at short range from the mill and from the reserve body of fresh troops which was hurled upon the captured battery killed or wounded nearly every one of the attacking party. No less than twelve out of the fourteen officers were shot down. The Mexicans then rushed the place with bayonet and the survivors among the Americans were driven back. They had made an heroic and magnificent charge.

There was one man, however, who was not driven back, and that was Master Benjamin Griffin. Retreat was a word with which he had never been familiar. It was not in naval tactics. Such a thing never occurred to him. He was bleeding from a bullet wound in the neck, fortunately merely a graze. The pistol had been knocked out of his left hand by a shot. He backed up against the wheel of the gun and struck out furiously. He was a master of sword play, too, of the broadsword or cutlass, that is, and it was not until the weapon was beaten out of his hand by the gun butts of the Mexicans and he himself knocked senseless by the same means that the battery was retaken.

The remains of Wright's storming party reformed out of range of the Mexican guns, and, re-enforced by a regiment from Cadwalader's division, prepared to move forward once more. At the same time MacIntosh's brigade had rushed gallantly up toward Casa Mata, only to be met by a fierce, withering discharge from the Mexican garrison. They

had been thrown into confusion and forced to give back. At this juncture the cavalry came sweeping down the road on the other side of the barranca to menace the left flank. General Worth directed Major Sumner to cross the ravine with his squadron, numbering some two hundred and seventy men, and confront the four thousand Mexicans. To reenforce him he ordered the Voltigeur regiment of Cadwalader's brigade, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph E. Johnston, to move up to the left at once and open fire on the cavalry.

Sumner's men went forward at a gallop, the Voltigeurs on the run. As they had to pass along the front of the Mexican right, not then actively engaged, they were forced to run the gauntlet of a terrific fire, which killed many. They struggled across the ravine, however, they scarcely knew how charged into the first regiment of cavalry, and drove it back with the fierceness of their onset. As the Voltigeurs crossed they at once deployed and opened fire.

"Ride over to Major Sumner," cried Worth, taking in the situation, "and tell him not to pursue. Simply hold off the enemy."

In a second Denton was scurrying across the field on his horse as fast as he could go. Then, if ever, he was thankful that Lieutenant Grant had taught him how to ride. The ground was broken and encumbered, but he easily sat in his saddle as the horse raced on. As he came within range of the

Mexican right the bullets began to sing about him. George Washington wrote when he was a young man, after the first of his battles:

"I heard the bullets whistle and, believe me, there is something charming in the sound."

Denton did not find it so. He wished with all his heart that he were out of range. He had plenty of moral courage, however, too much of it, in fact, for, unlike wiser and older men, he would not shelter himself behind his horse as Mr. Grant had taught him, a trick he had used himself at Monterey under Taylor's command, for the boy felt a foolish pride in sitting upright. He would show the army how the navy fought. He managed to escape unscathed and delivered his orders, returning safely as he had come.

Among the prisoners the dragoons had taken was his old friend Colonel Almonte, who had led the charge. The prisoner was desperately wounded, and indeed he died a few moments after the boy left him. Ned felt strangely sorry for him, too. All his animosity vanished at the sight of the suffering and dying man, who had almost hanged him.

Meanwhile a second assault was preparing on the mill and fort. One of Cadwalader's regiments had re-enforced MacIntosh, and another had been detailed to support the remains of Wright's party. The guns had of necessity been silent during the first assault, lest their own men should suffer from

their fire, but they were now blazing away at a great rate.

Duncan's battery had been advanced closer to Casa Mata, upon which it was pouring a heavy fire. As the brigade moved forward to assault it again, however, Duncan detached two of his guns, limbered up, wheeled them away to the left, took position on the edge of the ravine, and poured upon the masses of Mexican cavalrymen a most withering fire. It was a piece of good judgment, bold soldiership, which excited warm commendation from the general. And the help it gave Sumner's cavalry and the Voltigeurs enabled them once more to drive off the Mexican charging squadrons.

At the same time the second assault was delivered on the recaptured Mexican field battery in front of the mill. But now everything seemed to depend upon a successful advance of Garland's brigade, and to his great delight Denton was sent down with orders to hurry it along. But Garland's men were already moving. They had been met with a withering fire from the King's Mills, but advanced steadily nevertheless.

So severe was the fire to which they were subjected that the horses of Drum's battery were all killed. The men, however, ran the guns forward by hand to within two hundred feet of the walls, upon which they fired with furious rapidity and terrific effect until the other side gave way. Garland had made his dispositions admirably, and

when the boy galloped up to him with General Worth's orders he simply pointed to the mill and cried:

"Forward!"

It was no part of Denton's duty to join the assaulting party, but carried away by his enthusiasm he did so. He leaped from his horse and fell in with the troops. The men had had abundant practice in scaling walls, and under cover of the smoke they rushed up to the wall, gave their shoulders to one another, and scrambled over.

Some of them found themselves on the roofs of houses, others dropped into open yards. Those on the housetops fought desperately with the Mexican garrisons, which could not escape. Those in the yards rushed to the doors and beat them down with their gun-stocks and pieces of timber which they found in the yard, or with anything that came handy. They were met everywhere by a determined resistance. The Mexicans fought with despairing tenacity. They did not give up a foot of ground until they were compelled to do so.

The battle was raging all along the line now. The second assault had captured the field battery, which had been the object of the first attack. The Mexicans at last gave way before the American impetuosity. Their guns were wheeled to the right and opened upon the flying mass of men, and upon the Casa Mata, which still held out. Garland's brigade was supplemented by men from the first storming

party, who also swarmed into the mill at the other end.

Denton bore his part with the rest. He could not find Lieutenant Grant or Powers anywhere at first. He did not see them until, with others having cleared the roof of a house, he got a glimpse of a yard beyond. The fighting there had been ferocious, but the Mexicans had been driven out and Lieutenant Grant was bending down over the body of an American officer who had been seriously wounded. At that instant a Mexican soldier, musket in hand, ran from the house into the courtyard. He made straight for Grant.

Denton, who saw his peril, cried loudly. Grant lifted his head instantly, presenting his pistol at the Mexican. The soldier swerved and at the same instant Powers sprang at him. He, too, had seen the officer's peril, and though he found no voice—being a silent man—he rushed to the rescue. Presenting his piece fair at the sailor's breast, the Mexican pulled the trigger. As the smoke cleared away they saw poor Powers clap his hand to his breast, a look of great surprise on his face. As he did so, he exclaimed :

"You—you've killed me!"

He struggled toward the man as if to seize him, but uselessly. His sabre, and it was blood-stained enough to show that it had been used that day, dropped from his hand. He fell crashing to the ground. He could never speak again, even if he

wished to. Poor Powers! But he had died as he would have wished—in the heat of action and in the line of duty.

Denton, from where he stood on the low roof, about ten feet high, was right above the Mexican. Grant had raised his pistol, but before he could pull the trigger, a boyish figure hurled itself through the air. With a cry of rage the midshipman struck the Mexican, throwing him to the ground with such violence that the man's neck was broken, his head striking a piece of rock as he fell. The boy was pitched forward on his face, but sustained no injury. He scrambled to his feet with death and destruction in his heart and ran toward the prostrate figure of the Mexican.

"Steady!" cried Grant, catching his arm. "That man's done for. You don't need the sword."

"Poor Powers!" exclaimed Ned.

"Yes," said Grant; "but we've yet much to do. Come on."

He seized the boy by the arm and ran over to the next gate. The fight was out of the Mexicans, however. They had been driven from house to house, and Grant and Denton, mounting to the roof of the last building, took the last group of men prisoners.

The battle was over. The Mexican cavalry had effected nothing and had withdrawn. The King's Mills had been taken by a desperate assault after a series of hand-to-hand conflicts of the most severe character. Nine American guns, together with the

six captured, were concentrated on Casa Mata. It was evacuated instantly and seized by the Americans.

The powder in the fort was blown up, and the mills were thoroughly dismantled and destroyed. Meantime, the guns of Chapultepec, silent hitherto because they could not be fired without hitting their own men, were opened upon the Americans. The bombardment, which was replied to by Huger's two guns, was a fierce one. The positions they had captured were untenable. Indeed, no serious attempt to hold them had ever been contemplated. It was necessary that they should be captured and destroyed before the final movement upon Chapultepec could be made, but that was all.

Satisfied with what he had done so brilliantly, General Worth withdrew, bringing off his wounded under a heavy fire. The assault had been a bloody one all around. General Worth had lost over twenty-five per cent. of his total force in the attack, while the Mexican loss, including eight hundred prisoners, was much greater. It was a most brilliant feat of arms. Denton's part in it had been distinguished, but it was with a sad heart that the midshipman took back with him to camp the body of the faithful and silent sailor.

The Mexican party, which had recaptured their own guns, would have killed old Ben Griffin at once, but, believing him almost dead, they left him under one of the pieces, and when the guns were finally taken by the Americans he was not much

the worse for his fighting, and his aching head was forgotten on account of his aching heart. The grief of the old man for the loss of his shipmate Powers was pitiful.

"I tell you wot it is," said the sailor to a group of his friends of the Fourth Infantry. "Sam Powers didn't say much, but wot he did say wus allus to the pint. He'd done a mighty sight of fine work in his time. There's no one I'd ruther hev trusted to pass a weather earrin', or hold a ship up to a gale of wind, or stand by a man's side at the guns, or lead a boardin' party, than Sam. He was a most agreeable man, too. W'ich I never knowed him to conterdict me in his life. I'll never hev another shipmate like him, an' to think, with all due respect to ye, to think he wus killed by a blamed soger in a soger's fight 'stead of bein' shot down in a nice clean battle between ships! He wus on the *United States* w'en she took the *Macedonian*, an' on the *President* when she beat the *Endimmon*, an' to think of him dyin' here on shore! I don't often find myself without words to say, but this time I can't git no langwidge to fit the sitooation. Him an' me an' Master Denton——"

The old man shook his head and walked away. It was almost the first time in his life that he was at a loss for words. They buried Powers that afternoon with many another good fellow who had fallen in the fight. Lieutenant Grant, Captain Semmes, Denton, and old Ben Griffin were the chief mourn-

ers, but nearly all the Fourth Infantry were out with the burying squad. General Scott was there, with Captain Lee, too, and many other officers, so poor Sam Powers was given much honor in his death. He deserved it all.

After the chaplain had finished the burial service they fired the usual three volleys, a salute to general and private alike ; then the bugler stepped forward and sounded "taps," the sweetest and saddest of all trumpet-calls under such circumstances. As the notes rang out and echoed over the field, those who had assembled made a movement as if to disperse, but all was not yet over. Taps might do very well for a soldier, but in the mind of the old boatswain's mate there was something lacking to the ceremony, which he could supply. Something more suitable and more fitting than the notes of the bugle with which to close the career of a sailor.

With a mute look of interrogation toward Mr. Denton he stepped forth. He took off his cap—he had been busy with his needle during the armistice and had made himself a full naval uniform—lifted a silver boatswain's call, which he had preserved all through his captivity, and blew it solemnly and shrilly, in a strange and peculiar way.

"What's that?" whispered Lieutenant Grant to Denton.

"It's the honor we give to a captain. He's piping him over the side," returned the boy, choking back his tears.

CHAPTER XXVII

STORMING CHAPULTEPEC

The destruction of Molinos del Rey and the defeat of their army filled the Mexicans with dismay. General Scott did not give them any time to recover from it, either, for he at once began preparations for assaulting Chapultepec. With that stronghold in his possession the causeways leading toward the city gates would be practicable for his troops. While the enemy held that, however, it would be dangerous for him to attempt to advance toward the walls.

The castle of Chapultepec on the summit of the rock was built of stone, the walls being unusually massive and thick. The whole work was about nine hundred feet long, the main building being about six hundred feet. The castle itself was about ten feet high, and including bastions, parapets, redoubts, and batteries, was very substantially built. Two very strongly built stone walls surrounded the whole. The outer wall, some twelve feet from the inner, was from twelve to fifteen feet high. Over the main building of the castle rose a noble dome

bearing the coat of arms of the republic and topped by the brilliant Mexican flag, which added dignity to the institution.

The whole slope of the hill under the trees was dotted with forts, redoubts, intrenchments, and rifle-pits of various kinds. It was garrisoned by officers and students of the Mexican Military College, a large force of national guards, and a detachment of regulars of the Army of the South. The whole was under the command of General Bravo. A well-paved road zigzagged up the slope to the central part of the castle. It was also strongly fortified.

On the night of the 11th Captain Huger, who had commanded the battering pieces in the attack on Molinos del Rey, with our old friend Captain Lee of the engineers, traced the lines for the batteries. There were two eighteen-pounders and one eight-inch mortar, commanded by Captain Drum, about six hundred yards from the castle to the left of Tacubaya. This was battery number one. Battery number two contained a twenty-four pounder and an eight-inch mortar under Captain Huger. This was also placed to the left of Tacubaya, and a little farther from the castle. The third battery consisted of one eighteen-pounder and one eight-inch mortar. This was situated half-way between Tacubaya and Molinos del Rey, and was commanded by Captain Brooks and Lieutenant Anderson successively. The last battery was placed near the ruined mill. It

was only a large mortar commanded by Lieutenant Stone.

There had been much manœuvring of the American troops during the eleventh of September. Demonstrations in force were made before the San Antonio gate south of the city, and every effort made to deceive the Mexicans as to the real attack. Indeed, General Twiggs, with his division and the batteries appertaining to it, was left before the San Antonio gate to demonstrate heavily during the whole of the succeeding operations, to which he contributed materially by the boldness of his skirmishing, detaining large forces in front of him.

On the morning of the twelfth the bombardment of Chapultepec was begun and continued with furious energy all day. The Americans were good shots then, as always. The gun practice might fairly be considered marvellous. They poured a perfect rain of shot and shell upon the castle and cut it up terribly. The bombardment, however, was gallantly returned by the guns of Chapultepec and the scene was one of surpassing magnificence. At night the fury of the fire ceased on both sides, although the American guns moved to different positions and sent shells at intervals into the works, to which no reply could be made.

That night General Scott directed the assaulting columns to get into position. There were two roads which led around the base of Chapultepec toward the practicable slope on the western side. General

Pillow had command of the party to attack by way of the western road. General Quitman, at last getting permission to take his brigade in action, was ordered to move around the eastern road and join Pillow's party in the assault. Worth, in command of the rest of the troops, as soon as the assault was made was to turn the right of Chapultepec, and when he struck the road to the San Cosme gate he was to advance and seize it.

At daybreak the next morning the bombardment was renewed with determined fury, while the troops moved to their designated positions. The signal for the advance was to be the cessation of the fire from the American batteries. At half after seven o'clock Generals Quitman and Pillow informed General Scott that both columns were ready. At the head of Quitman's division was a volunteer storming party of seventy marines, supported by a force of one hundred and twenty volunteers from other divisions under Captain Silas Casy, the whole party being commanded by Major Levi Twiggs of the Marine Corps.

The troops were provided with fascines, bundles of twigs, fagots or brushwood, for filling up ditches and with ladders for scaling the walls. Behind the storming party Quitman had massed the United States Marines and the Pennsylvania Volunteers under Lieutenant-Colonel Watson of the Marine Corps, and then the New York and South Carolina Volunteers under our friend General Shields. In front of

the storming party was the youngest lieutenant in the American forces, Joe Bailey. By his side, acting as aide to Major Twiggs, was Midshipman Denton of the United States Navy. The irrepressible youngster was determined to be in everything that he could get in. Close at hand was the old boatswain's mate, talking, as usual, but ready for business also.

At eight o'clock the fire from the American batteries suddenly ceased. General Quitman, riding to the head of his column—a handsome old figure he was, too, white-haired, gray-bearded, erect as an arrow—gave the order to advance. With a cheer the men went forward on the double-quick. The road was a narrow causeway, ditches and boggy ground on either side, which made manœuvring impossible. There was nothing for them to do but go straight ahead until they reached the slope of Chapultepec.

At the same instant General Pillow put his own column, headed by a similar storming party, in motion. With each column were several sections of field artillery, which were to do tremendous services which would cover their gunners with glory. For a few moments the American batteries were silent, and then, as Scott learned that the assaulting columns were under way, the bombardment commenced once more.

General Pillow's division had the easier approach at first, for they charged over the ground that had been covered by the dismantled works at Molino

del Rey, but as they had the shortest distance to go they came soonest under fire. As they broke through the smoke they were immediately engaged by the Mexican force on the slope of the hill.

Every intrenchment blazed with fire. The Americans were shot down in scores, but came resolutely on. Just at the foot of the hill General Pillow was wounded. His line wavered for a moment, but was rallied by the officers and went on, slowly taking one place after another, and fighting desperately hand to hand with the Mexicans, who were disputing with magnificent heroism every foot of the way.

In that advance up the hill one of the regiments that bore the most conspicuous part was that of Colonel Joseph E. Johnston, afterward the great antagonist of General Sherman. As Pillow advanced to the assault, Worth moved out to flank the fortress. Seeing Pillow hard pressed, however, he despatched one of his brigades to re-enforce the attack, which was pressed home with splendid resolution.

On the other road Quitman was having a desperate and dangerous task. The road approached the base of Chapultepec, and then turned to the northeast straight to the city. It was a direct road, and here were concentrated large bodies of Mexican troops. The road had been fortified as well. As the head of the column, now moving in quick time, approached the hill they discovered formidable works directly in front of them. There was no time for

hesitation or deliberation, as there was no room for manœuvring. They went at them with bayonets, and captured them by storm, clearing the enemy out from before them.

Advancing on the run they came to the foot of the hill only to find their progress stopped by a wide, deep ditch filled with water. They had to stand there under fire for some time until enough fascines could be brought up with which to fill it. They took shelter behind some low stone walls from which they drove the Mexicans, and impatiently waited, the field pieces of the brigade meanwhile engaging the enemy at short range. The men behaved with unusual steadiness. They were under the eye of Quitman himself, for the old hero rode to the front to see for himself how things were getting along.

They were subjected to a fearful fire from the forts and works, and the delay was intensely galling. Old Ben Griffin, with his ceaseless clatter and rough humor, cheered the attacking party mightily. He got over some of his prejudice that day, as we shall see. Finally the ditch was filled and the real storming of the hill began. The brigade by this time was closely massed behind the advance party, and the instant the word was given, with loud cheers they sprang at the steep hill. Some of them followed the zigzags of the road, others scrambled up the face. There was fighting every step of the way. It took time and the loss of many men, but slowly they worked themselves to the top.

Quitman's men and Pillow's reached the vicinity of the castle at about the same time. The crest of the rock was, of course, open and unencumbered by trees. With loud shouts the men broke from cover, and carrying their ladders in their hands at once started for the walls. Here Major Twiggs was shot dead. The fire of the Mexicans at close range was particularly deadly; the men fell on every hand. The impetus of the charge, however, was so great that the troops reached the walls and planted the ladders.

By this time the advance parties were nearly wiped out, but the supports were close on their heels. Little Joe Bailey was the first man to mount a ladder in the division. He scrambled on top of the parapet, and was shot by a Mexican soldier and stabbed by bayonets at the same time. They literally pitchforked the boy back over the walls.

The next moment Ned Denton would have followed, had not old Ben Griffin unceremoniously shoved him aside. As Bailey fell the sailor leaped over the wall. He did not stay on the crest a second, but dropped into the space between. He was at once attacked by a dozen men. They could not shoot at him on account of their crowding, for fear of hitting their own men, and with magnificent courage and strength he held them off, creating a diversion for a few moments which enabled Denton and the rest of the marines to follow.

After the first one or two had gained the court

the Americans poured over the wall in a flood. The place was cleared in the twinkling of an eye. Stopping for nothing they made a rush at the second wall. The first man over this was Captain Miller of the Pennsylvania Volunteers. On the other side of the castle Pillow's division had been equally successful. Lieutenant Lewis A. Armistead, the man who burst through the Union line at Gettysburg, was the first man over there. Captain George E. Pickett, who immortalized himself in command of the same charge on the same field, carried his regiment over it. Lieutenant James Longstreet, another famous soldier subsequently, was one of the first men in the castle. A section of artillery, with Pillow's division under Lieutenant Thomas J. Jackson, Stonewall he was called in 1861, did notable service, forging up the hill and firing upon the fort at close range. The outer works were soon taken, and the battle raged throughout the rooms of the castle.

In the main building and before it were concentrated the boys of the Military College. Here General Bravo, who had commanded with conspicuous gallantry and skill, was at last driven. And here he made his last stand for his republic. The boys were youngsters like Denton and Bailey, from fourteen to eighteen years of age. They fought with the desperation and valor of veterans. They scorned to surrender, refusing all appeals which were made to them to throw down their arms, and were only over-

whelmed in one last assault. Many of them were bayoneted where they stood. They had indeed deserved well of the Mexican Republic, and their last stand is recalled gratefully by their country as a marvel of boyish consecration and valor.

General Bravo himself was taken prisoner by force of arms. His sword was beaten from his hand, and he was hurled backward. He would have been bayoneted instantly by the excited troops had it not been for Denton and Griffin, who both interposed to save their former benefactor. General Quitman received the surrender of the fort in person. He had lost many of his best and bravest soldiers and officers, among the wounded being General Shields. He did not hesitate, however, on that account. There was still something to be done.

Turning the command of the fort over to Pillow's brigade, with instructions that they should look after the wounded, Quitman summoned his own men and led them down the slope. The way into Mexico was open, and he proposed to advance even to the city wall itself.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CITY AT LAST

At the foot of Chapultepec rock the command was halted, cartridge-boxes refilled, regiments which were scattered reassembled, and every preparation was made for an immediate advance. Away off to the left, on the road leading to the San Cosme gate, rolling volleys of musketry with the deeper boom of a cannon proclaimed that General Worth had succeeded in turning Chapultepec, and as he had not been delayed by the assault, he was already heavily engaged. As soon as all was ready, General Quitman gave the order to advance.

As has been stated, the road was a very broad, perfectly level avenue, down the centre of which, on arches of masonry, ran an aqueduct, which was nothing more or less than an open stone trough. On the right and left of the causeway were deep ditches filled with water. The aqueduct filled the middle of the causeway, but there was sufficient space on either side of it for the troops to advance.

Throwing the mounted rifles to the front, supporting them by Drum's light artillery, next by the marines—or what was left of them—and then by the rest of the division, the advance was taken up.

They were subjected to a harmless artillery fire at long range as they progressed, but they did not come in touch with the foe until they had reached a point half way between Chapultepec and the city. The causeway was there intersected by a deep ravine, the road being carried across it by a bridge. Beyond this was a battery of guns, on its right a parapet several hundred feet long. This was crowded with infantry.

As soon as the American advance came within range the battery opened fire, and as Quitman urged his division forward the Mexican infantry at once began the battle. The resistance was spirited. An eight-inch howitzer of Drum's battery was run to the front and supported by a deadly fire from the mounted rifles and the marines. The Mexicans were at last driven from their position by a bayonet charge. Lieutenant Fitz John Porter, commanding the howitzer, was wounded, as were many other officers and men. The place was finally carried by storm and the way cleared. The advance of the division at this point was materially aided by the long-range fire of a section of Duncan's battery from Worth's command on the other road, which made excellent gun practice.

Every archway now concealed a Mexican force, and as the troops came running up the causeway they were met by a series of discharges at close range. It became necessary to clear the arches by hand-to-hand fighting, which was gallantly done.

Their loss was severe, but they pressed their successive charges with such resistless energy that finally the Mexicans became disheartened, abandoned cover and fled toward the city, hotly pursued by the cavalry. The Belen Gate, toward which the causeway led, was very heavily fortified, and as soon as the Mexicans had gained the shelter of the walls and the Americans had come within range, they were received by a rapid and continuous fire which completely swept the causeway.

The infantry, by Quitman's orders, immediately took shelter in the arches. The guns and gunners, however, had to stand in the open and suffered severely. The infantry advanced by rushing from arch to arch, gaining the shelter of one, and, watching their chance, darting to another before they could be fired upon. But the guns had to be run forward by hand, and many a brave fellow lost his life in the endeavor to take the place of horses long since killed or abandoned.

Denton, being a sailor, was not much of an infantry officer, but he knew all about the handling of artillery. At least he was conversant with the handling of ship artillery, and had picked up the differences involved in the handling of siege or field guns. As the artillery officers were picked off he volunteered to General Quitman to take charge of a section. With him went old Ben Griffin, of course. He was given the heaviest piece in the battery, a sixteen-pounder.

The boatswain's mate was the best marksman on the *Mississippi*, and the practice he made with that heavy piece was marvellous. The troops in the arches kept up a constant musketry fire on the walls, under cover of which the guns were run closer and closer. The effect of their discharge was terrible. At short range the Belen Gate was literally blown to pieces. The lighter guns fired shell and shrapnel with deadly effect upon the defenders of the gate, while the heavier pieces fairly battered it down.

It was fearfully hot, and the smoke and smell of burning powder, the absence of drinking-water, for the canteens had long since been exhausted, the terrific labor required to move the heavy guns forward by hand, the constant procession of wounded to the rear, the bodies of the men who were killed at their pieces, were all appalling, and would have daunted the bravest heart had it not been for the excitement of the battle and the success with which it was being fought.

General Quitman showed himself a very marvel of courage, exposing himself freely first on one side of the causeway, then on the other. Now he led the troops forward from the arches, now he directed the fire of the howitzers; now he encouraged Denton at his heavy gun.

"Excellent practice," he cried, as he saw one of the shots take effect on the wall, tearing a great hole in it.

"It's a way we have in the navy, sir!" yelled old

Ben, who had first thrown aside his cap, then pulled off his shirt, and was now working the gun half naked, as if he had been on the deck of a ship in action.

"I see," cried Quitman; "it is a good way. Give them another!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

The response from the gate and the works around it became feebler and feebler. The walls were swept by the fire of the American troops. At fifteen minutes after one General Quitman determined to storm the gate. The rifles and marines were ordered to form a storming party. The horses had been left under the arches far to the rear. Everyone was on foot. Placing himself at the head of the storming party and commanding the batteries to cease firing the old general led them forward.

The men were cheering madly and Denton conceived that he had done all the damage he could with the piece of artillery he had volunteered to command, so he followed on foot with the rest. As soon as the charge began the Mexicans swarmed out on the roofs of the adjoining houses and in the gateway, but the attack was pressed home with such vigor that they were scattered in every direction. Mounting the aqueduct, so as to uncover the roofs of the house and clear them of their defenders, the men of Quitman's division entered the Mexican capital at twenty minutes after one o'clock on the afternoon of the 13th of September, 1847.

There was still much to be done. Barricades were visible in every direction, the Mexicans were fighting hard from behind them, but the troops pouring in in the wake of the storming party a hand-to-hand struggle at once began. House after house was cleared, barricade after barricade taken, until the whole of the section of the city in the vicinity of the Belen Gate was wrested from the hands of the enemy. Guns were brought up, the Mexican artillery reversed, and all were placed behind the Mexican barricades so as to command the city.

Furious attacks were made on Quitman's force, but without avail. They were repulsed with heavy loss and every moment added to the number of the Americans. The fate of the city was sealed.

And it was Denton's good fortune to see a part of the attack on the other gate as well, for General Quitman despatched him to tell General Worth of his success. The horses had been brought up and Denton started to cross the country. Under the walls the going was practicable. The midshipman did not remember that the wall between Worth and Quitman still remained in possession of the Mexicans, and before he knew it he had galloped within range of the garrison. There was nothing for him to do but go on. He put spur to his horse, and this time, having been urged thereto by Lieutenant Grant, who had heard of his foolhardiness of a few days before, he dropped to the side of his horse away from the walls and clung there tenaciously.

The Mexicans made very bad practice, but just as he had congratulated himself that he had escaped entirely a bullet struck his horse. He stumbled along a few feet, fell, and pitched his rider heavily to the ground. Denton was badly bruised by the fall, but the fire was too hot for him to think about that. He scrambled to his feet somehow and ran along the road, much alarmed at the thought of his danger, but again he got out of range without further mishap.

The battle was raging furiously around the San Cosme Gate. The soldiers of Worth had proceeded along the causeway in much the same way that the soldiers of Quitman had done, but they had met a more determined resistance at the gate. There was a church with a low stone tower outside the gate, and as Denton scrambled up on the causeway and ran toward General Worth, he happened to cast his eye up at the tower, and was astonished to see a puff of smoke burst from it and to hear a moment after the report of a cannon.

"General Worth!" he cried, saluting.

"Why, it's the sailor lad!" exclaimed Worth.

"General Quitman bade me tell you that he has entered the city."

"We shall be in in a moment," answered Worth, some of the annoyance he felt at not having won that glory appearing in his face. "We have had desperate fighting, and—look at that, gentlemen!' pointing to the church. "Somebody with a genius

for war has got up there. He is actually firing over the wall, taking those Mexicans in the rear. Order a company of infantry to go there and occupy the church to support him."

"May I go along, sir?" eagerly asked Denton.

"You are not under my command, sir," said Worth. "Go where you please. There's likely to be hot fighting there, though."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the delighted boy, scampering off.

The infantry approached the church on a dead run, under a hot fire. Most of them reached it in safety.

"Here, young man," said the captain of the company, "scramble up that tower and tell whoever is in command there that we are here to support him."

Up the stairs of the church Denton sped. What was his astonishment and delight to find his old friend, Lieutenant Grant, on top. He had hauled the gun up there and commanded it. Grant was an infantryman and the quartermaster of his regiment, and, as has been said, he had no business to be fighting at all, but he was fighting just the same! Everybody around him was wildly excited. The men were jumping for joy as they saw the terrific effect of their shots on the exposed Mexicans, but the lieutenant himself was as cool and impassive as if he were at home.

"General Worth has sent you a company of in-

fantry to support you," cried Denton. "They are in the church below."

"Yes," answered Grant, working his piece; "glad to see you safe."

"Say, that was a splendid shot of yours," said the boy, as he marked the effect of the last discharge.

"That so?"

"Yes. Let me have a shot."

"All right. See what you can do."

There was a barricade right back of the gate. Denton turned the six-pound howitzer upon it and fired. The shot struck the barricade fair in the centre. The shell exploded at the impact and blew a great hole in it. Through it they could see the Mexicans running in every direction.

"That's a good shot, youngster," said the officer; "you shall try again."

Before the piece could be loaded, however, another officer from Worth's staff came to Lieutenant Grant with a summons from that general.

"Take charge here," he said, turning to Ned, "until I come back."

And for the second time that day Denton had command of a piece of artillery firing on the Mexican gates. In a short time Grant returned and relieved him.

"What did the general want?" asked Denton, curiously.

"Oh, he said a great many nice things, complimentary and all that."

"Is that all?"

"No, he sent me another piece of artillery."

"Where is it?"

"At the church gate."

"Aren't you going to bring it up?"

"Look around you. Is there any room?"

"Of course not. But why did you take it, then?"

"Do you suppose that I, a second lieutenant, was going to give a major-general any advice? Not much. I took the gun out of his sight and left it there."

"I see," returned the midshipman, laughing.

"Is she all right?" asked Grant, pointing to the howitzer.

"Yes."

"Let her go again.'

In another moment Worth's soldiers stormed the gate.

EPILOGUE

Of the adventures of the midshipman in Mexico there is little more to be said. With the assault and capture of the San Cosme and Belen Gates, the fighting, save for a few guerilla skirmishes in other parts of the country, was terminated. Santa Anna, with his disheartened and disorganized troops, withdrew from the city, which was surrendered to Scott the next morning. The war was over.

Denton, whose services had been communicated to the commander-in-chief by Generals Worth and Quitman, had the pleasure and honor of entering with the first detachment. This, in consideration of their gallant services, included the marines. And for once forgetting his prejudices, or having had them greatly modified by his experience with the hated sea soldiers during the past week, with them triumphantly marched Master Benjamin Griffin, Chief Boatswain's Mate of the *Mississippi*.

Ned saw some brief service during the rioting which ensued before General Scott got the city well in hand. Santa Anna had opened the jails and prisons before he left the city, and had let loose a mob of abandoned wretches, primarily to prey upon the American invaders, really to sack the hapless

town. The marines, who were appointed provost guards, with the assistance of the soldiers, soon put down the lawlessness. There was a day's sharp skirmishing and then order was restored and maintained.

Denton bore a prominent part in all this, and he and old Ben had the good fortune to rescue, in the very nick of time and quite by chance, the woman who had effected their escape from prison. They had thought much about her since their escape, and had been very desirous of finding some trace of her, but had no clew to her identity save her appearance. They rejoiced, therefore, that circumstances enabled them to be of service to her. The secret of her assistance to them lay in the fact that she was an American woman who had been married to a Mexican officer, Colonel Ramiro, a gallant soldier who had been killed at Chapultepec.

When General Scott transmitted his despatches announcing his final and decisive victory to the United States, Captain Semmes, Denton, and old Ben Griffin took advantage of the escort to report to their ship. With them went Madam Ramiro and her two children. She determined, since the death of her husband, to return to the United States once more. They carried home for burial also the body of poor Joe Bailey. He had got into the fight at last—and out of it forever at the same time. His loss and the death of old Sam Powers were abiding griefs to the boy for a long time.

In Scott's despatches was a letter to Commodore Perry commending the midshipman for his faithful services, and in the letter, to Ned's great delight, there was favorable mention of old Griffin as well. The letter brought fruit, too, for when the honors and rewards of the campaign were distributed Denton received a commission as a lieutenant for his extraordinary and brilliant services in the cutting out of the *Creole*, the loss of the *Somers*, and the operations in the valley of Mexico. He was the youngest lieutenant in the navy at that time. It was a pleasure to him to learn, too, when he reached the ship, that the milk which had been the cause of all his misfortunes had reached the ship safely, and that it had been used to the great benefit of the sick men for whom he and his comrades had adventured. We shall hear of him again on the Mississippi—the river, not the frigate—in 1861–65.

Before they left the valley they paid a visit to the grave of old Sam Powers, whose body, through the generosity of Commodore Denton, who had heard the story of his devotion to his boy, was afterward removed to the United States.

Old Ben Griffin was as talkative as ever. From this time on he had a new and marvellous account to relate to his shipmates of his experiences on shore. The part he played grew with each succeeding discussion of it until it became a byword among his companions that "he an' Leftenant Denton an'

General Scott had fit all the battles an' had at last took the City of Mexico." There was one actor in their adventures the old man never forgot to mention. When doubt was cast upon his recitals he was accustomed to say:

"Ef old Sam Powers wus here, he'd agree with me. He was the most agreeable sailorman I was ever shipmates with. Ye know Sam never talked much, but wot he did say wus allus to the pint."

And this was a knock-down argument.

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